

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Management College

Study field: Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation

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Summary of the Assessment of the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

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The Riga Management College (RMC) has established a regulatory framework that covers most academic and administrative processes, and these regulations are generally clear and well-written. Admission procedures are transparent and consistently implemented, and students report feeling supported and appreciate the personalized learning environment created by small groups and highly accessible academic staff. This small-scale setting fosters a homely atmosphere and strong individual attention, which is a distinctive strength of the institution.

However, several processes remain untested or lack evidence of implementation, including internships, graduation procedures, and final thesis preparation and presentation. Since the College does not yet have graduates and internships have not started, there is no proven system or feedback available for these critical components. Consequently, experts cannot fully assess these areas at this stage, but it is expected that these processes—and the feedback they generate—will be integrated into the quality assurance system in the future.

The quality assurance system has been described, but its effectiveness is not yet demonstrated. While planning and implementation stages are evident, the “Check” and “Act” phases of the quality management cycle are underdeveloped, leaving the quality loop incomplete. Student numbers remain critically low, raising concerns about the sustainability of the study programme and the institution as a whole. The imbalance between Latvian and foreign students creates challenges for integration and limits the programme’s relevance to the national labor market. While the College follows the founders’ directive to open groups even with minimal enrollment, this approach leads to fragmented and financially inefficient delivery.

Resource provision is adequate, and ICT infrastructure supports both in-person and remote learning. However, resource allocation lacks transparency, and there are no clear procedures for requesting additional materials, such as books, conference participation, or training. Study courses are well-developed and aligned with professional standards, but their content could be constantly updated to reflect current scientific and industry trends.

Collaboration with social partners and the labor market is at an early stage and needs significant strengthening, particularly through partnerships with professional associations in tourism and trade sectors. Internationalization efforts are promising but remain in their initial phase. The College does not yet hold an Erasmus+ Charter but has applied for it, which, if granted, will significantly support mobility and international cooperation. Stronger international partnerships are needed to enhance applied research and academic collaboration.

Research management is formally structured, with clear regulations and remuneration rules for research activities, and staff confirm these are accessible. Student involvement in research is encouraged through funding schemes and annual competitions, which is commendable. Nevertheless, applied research output is limited, and concerns remain about the quality of publications, including borderline predatory journals. Employers have articulated clear research needs—such as cross-border tourism, digitalization, and AI applications—that align with the College’s thematic priorities, presenting an opportunity for future development.

The College implements one study programme, “Tourism Service Organisation”, which demonstrates clear labour-market relevance, supported by employer confirmation of ongoing demand for graduates. Its strengths include a stable academic staff structure, support for research activities, adequate learning resources such as industry-standard software, well supported Moodle, international databases and equal internship access for all students further reinforces practical orientation. At the same time, several weaknesses require attention: the very low enrollment threatens financial sustainability, inconsistencies in student data and a notable dropout rate point to issues with student progression; and limited international cooperation constrain long-term

development.

Despite the challenges, the College demonstrates strong motivation and commitment to improvement. It is evident that the institution is in an initial stage of development, but the willingness to progress, openness to feedback, and readiness to implement changes indicate significant potential. With focused efforts on closing the quality loop, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing internationalization and research capacity, the College is well-positioned to achieve its strategic goals and deliver high-quality education in the future.

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1. At present, “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation” is the only study field offered at the College, and the College anticipates that a positive outcome of the current accreditation process will lead to an increase in student numbers. According to the site visit meeting with the College management, while there is an ongoing process to develop new study programmes in the field of Management, tourism remains the core and essential area of focus for the institution. The College representatives claim that they position the RMC as having a distinctive role in the Latvian higher education market by providing short-cycle study programmes and specialist-level qualifications in tourism, which it considers a unique and competitive advantage.

The aims of the study field at RMC are clearly defined and attainable. According to the Self-Assessment report (SAR, p.12), “The aim of the study field is to prepare professional and creative specialists in the tourism and hospitality industry who can operate under changing social, economic, and environmental conditions, skillfully applying digital solutions and sustainable business principles.” The study programme goal—“To prepare competent tourism service organizers capable of creatively applying digital and sustainable solutions in tourism enterprises in response to changing environmental and market conditions”—is closely aligned with the study field aim. This demonstrates coherence and clarity, as well as a strong connection between the study programme and the overarching objectives of the study field.

The study field and study programme comply with the main directions of the College’s strategic development. The College’s strategic goals, as stated in the SAR, include “A modern study environment and an efficiently organized process for the preparation of qualified specialists, International cooperation to promote knowledge transfer. Labor market research and the development of new, promising study programs in the fields of business and tourism. Employer involvement in the study and research process. Ensuring public recognition and visibility of the College’s image.” These priorities are reflected in the development activities of the tourism study field, confirming alignment with institutional strategy.

The relevance of the study field is supported by national and sectoral priorities. The College analyses the study field and study programme in relation to the Latvian Tourism Development Action Plan 2021–2027, the Latvian National Development Plan 2021–2027, Latvia’s Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030, and the Latvian Export Promotion Strategy for Tourism and Event Industries until 2027. Based on these frameworks, the College considers the tourism field promising, with a potentially growing need for specialists in the longer term. However, the experts are not fully convinced by this analysis, as most of these strategies were developed before the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent geopolitical changes, including the war in Ukraine. These events have significantly altered the tourism sector in Latvia, and the market conditions are no longer the same as those assumed in earlier planning documents. Although the social partners mentioned the lack of well educated specialists in the tourism sector and they expressed support for hiring international

students, they also mentioned that some Latvian language knowledge is definitely expected. Although the College demonstrates commitment to sustaining the study programme through previous profits and founders' investments, the experts note that the current strategy—relying almost exclusively on the tourism study field—poses a significant risk. If the College is not able to achieve self-financing in the shorter term, this could threaten the sustainability or even the existence of the study field, study programme and entire College. A broader diversification of study fields and income sources would be necessary to ensure long-term stability and reduce vulnerability to market fluctuations in the tourism sector.

1.1.2. The College has prepared a SWOT analysis (SAR, pp. 15-16) and set priorities for development. However, the depth and quality of the analysis raise concerns. While the SWOT exists, the identified strengths—such as provision of required materials, offering studies in Latvian and English, and opportunities to acquire entrepreneurial competences—appear to be basic requirements rather than distinctive advantages, resembling “hygiene factors” rather than true competitive strengths. The main weakness acknowledged is the existence of only one study programme in the field and a very small number of students. Despite this, competition within the tourism study field has not been analyzed, which limits the strategic value of the SWOT.

Several weaknesses relate to the College's inability to provide appealing marketing and its weak brand positioning. The College has outlined plans to improve visibility and strengthen its brand through events, participation in education fairs in Latvia and abroad, international conferences (e.g., Ukraine), a new homepage, and collaboration with high schools. While these initiatives are positive, it is important to note that a strong institutional reputation begins with a robust study field and study programme that deliver a positive student experience; marketing can only support and amplify existing strengths, not compensate for structural weaknesses.

Since the introduction of the College's strategy in 2023, two previously listed strengths and two weaknesses have disappeared from the SWOT analysis presented in SAR. Practical studies and learning while working are no longer considered strengths, and the ability to attract long-term international partners and the low number of PhD-qualified staff are no longer listed as weaknesses. The SAR team explained in the site visit meeting that practical learning remains part of the study programme, but internships have not yet taken place, so there is no evidence to claim this as a strength. Similarly, most students study full-time, so combining work and studies is not a distinguishing feature. Regarding weaknesses, the SAR team confirmed that there are insufficient international partnerships, despite this issue being removed from the SWOT. This inconsistency raises questions about the accuracy and transparency of the analysis.

While most weaknesses identified in the SWOT are reflected in the College's strategy and development plan until 2028, the main focus of the strategy is on strengthening research activities. Some opportunities listed in the SWOT—such as creating lifelong learning and professional development programmes to attract adults seeking skill upgrades, developing new study programmes in business and tourism, and leveraging international projects—are not highlighted in the strategy and have not materialized in practice. This indicates a gap between opportunity identification and strategic implementation.

As it was mentioned, the strategy focuses on research activities, and the second core process - studies - should be at least equally prioritized at the strategic level. A higher education institution's primary mission is to ensure high-quality teaching and learning, which directly impacts student satisfaction, employability, and institutional reputation. The strategy risks becoming unbalanced and misaligned with the institution's fundamental purpose.

There is no strong evidence that the SWOT analysis is meaningfully connected to strategic management. Although the SWOT is included in the College's strategy, only some activities and priorities outlined in the strategy align with the SWOT findings. Although the College has defined general KPIs in its Strategy Implementation Control Card, there is no evidence of baseline or target

values for these indicators. Without clear starting points and measurable goals, it is difficult to assess progress or determine whether strategic objectives are being achieved. This limits the effectiveness of performance monitoring and reduces accountability in strategy implementation.

1.1.3. The SAR (pp. 5-6 and 17-19) provides general information about the responsibilities of the main management bodies of the College; however, given that there is only one study field and one study programme, these bodies essentially serve only them. Due to the small number of employees, staff members hold multiple roles and responsibilities, which leads to fragmentation and a high level of workload. While this structure allows flexibility, it also creates risks related to efficiency and clarity in decision-making. This also may lead to the inconsistent implementation of processes, making it essential for the College to strengthen role definition and internal coordination to maintain quality and sustainability.

The management structure of the study field is simple, but covers all the necessary tasks and operations. The Head of the study field carries the main responsibility for implementing and developing the study programme and also serves as the study programme director. She represents the study field in the College Council and the Methodological Commission and collaborates closely with the Study Department. The site visit meetings confirmed that the Head of the study field has a clear understanding of processes, requirements, and responsibilities. She actively collects feedback, addresses problems, and provides guidance to students and academic staff, which ensures smooth day-to-day functioning.

However, the concentration of responsibilities in one person creates a significant risk for continuity and sustainability. The entire management and development of the study field rely heavily on the Head of the study field, making the system vulnerable in case of her absence or turnover. Furthermore, site visit meetings revealed inconsistencies in the understanding of roles and procedures among other academic and administrative staff. For example, tasks of the Methodological Commission and procedures for student assessment were interpreted differently by staff members and even by the members of the Methodological Commission themselves. This indicates that communication and internal training need improvement to ensure that written regulations are consistently implemented in practice and that responsibilities of different decision-making bodies are clearly understood.

Administrative and technical support for the study programme is adequate. Based on the site visit meetings and Procedura Nr.1-2. 1.5 .16, Studiju Procesu Organizesana, the Study Department provides essential assistance in organizing studies, preparing the study environment and Moodle systems, and supplying templates for academic staff. These functions meet the operational needs of the study field. In addition to this, technical support for the study field is also provided by the technical staff of the RMC. Further administrative and technical assistance is ensured by staff from accounting, the quality system manager, student admission, the international cooperation coordinator, and the internship placement coordinator, all of whom contribute to the effective functioning and support of the study process.

1.1.4. The College has established clear and formal procedures for student admission, which are implemented by the Admission specialists in accordance with the main regulatory document: The Admission Regulation for RMC. This regulation is well-structured and clearly describes admission requirements and processes, including distinctions between foreign applicants and local candidates. Admission requirements are formal, based on prior education and language skills, with no field-specific prerequisites. The regulation even specifies the minimum group size required for profitability: "if the number of applicants in a study program in one of the forms of study (full-time, part-time) is less than the minimum number of places of study - 12 students, the Admission Commission may take a decision not to approve the results of the competition." However, in practice, the admission specialist and the head of the study field confirmed during the site visit that

they have received instructions from the owner to admit every potential student, even when group sizes are far below the minimum threshold and teaching cannot be profitable. In the site visit meetings, the students and staff described the admission process consistently with the regulation, indicating that the written procedures match the reality of implementation.

The College also has a clear and well-written regulation for the recognition of prior learning (Rules for recognition of competences acquired outside of formal education or professional experience and study results achieved in previous education at the Riga Management College). This document outlines requirements and processes for recognizing both prior formal learning and non-formal education or professional experience. During the site visit meeting also the students confirmed that they were informed about this possibility during the admission process, although the discussion with the students clarified that their understanding about the recognition of prior learning (RPL) aim and process is slightly different and they do not understand the main idea and purpose of the RPL. However, the actual implementation of recognition procedures cannot be assessed, as no applicants have used this option so far, but the potential users (students having former experience or education in the study field) need to be better informed and advised about the aims and procedure of the process.

1.1.5. The College has set four general principles to frame the student assessment procedure: summing the positive achievements, transparency and clarity of requirements, diversity in assessment types, and alignment (SAR, p. 21). While these principles provide a foundation, it is quite unexpected that alignment with learning outcomes, student-centeredness, and fairness are not mentioned, although these are core principles of ESG standards. This omission raises concerns about the comprehensiveness of the assessment framework.

The organizational side of student assessment is described in the Study Regulations of Riga Management College, which outline the main assessment procedure, as well as retaking tests and appealing results. However, certain requirements stated in the SAR (p. 22, “Retaking or late completion of an assessment is a paid service. If a student misses an assessment due to justified reasons (e.g., illness, family circumstances), they may retake it free of charge, based on the decision of the College Director”) - are not included in the Study Regulations. This inconsistency creates ambiguity for students and suggests that the regulations should be updated to ensure clarity and transparency of requirements.

Additionally, paragraph 7.4 of the Study Regulations states that students who have not settled financial obligations are not allowed to take tests, and the absence of a grade due to this restriction is considered an academic debt. Experts highlight that preventing students from demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes due to financial debt may not be legal and could compromise fairness. Furthermore, lecturers should not have access to students’ financial information to decide whether the student can participate in the test or not. The procedure should be revised so that decisions regarding grade submission (not taking the test) are handled by authorized administrative staff rather than academic personnel.

The Study Regulations also specify in paragraph 7.5 that the final tests of the study course are an exam or a test (rating on a 10-point scale). Experts recommend greater flexibility in assessment methods to align with ESG Standard 1.3, which emphasizes that assessment should allow students to demonstrate achievement of intended learning outcomes and provide feedback linked to learning advice. Incorporating varied assessment methods—such as home assignments, group work, and project-based evaluations—would better accommodate diverse student needs and strengths, supporting a more student-centered approach.

1.1.6. The College has formal documents regulating academic integrity and plagiarism prevention, including Plagiarism Control and Prevention at Riga Management College, the RMC Code of Ethics, and relevant clauses in the Study Regulation. These documents outline principles and procedures for

maintaining academic honesty. However, the site visit meetings revealed that neither students nor staff could recall specific regulatory documents, indicating that awareness of these policies is limited among stakeholders.

The SAR states that plagiarism detection is supported by the use of Plag.Iv, but teachers cannot access the tool directly; they must request assistance from the Study Department and receive a report afterward. This process is described in the regulations, but site visit meetings showed that academic staff have varying interpretations of how plagiarism prevention and detection are implemented and what tools are available. Furthermore, there is no clear guidance for teachers on how to respond if cheating is detected, which creates uncertainty in enforcement.

Currently, the only procedure that is clearly documented and regulated concerns plagiarism detection for final papers. However, as there are no graduates yet, this process has not been applied, and its effectiveness cannot be verified. Students confirmed that they were informed about the consequences of cheating during admission, which suggests some level of awareness, but this does not compensate for the lack of consistent implementation and clarity among staff.

An emerging issue is the use of AI tools by students. While this topic is being discussed internally, there is no agreed approach or regulation on whether AI should be prohibited or allowed as a supportive tool. The absence of clear rules creates ambiguity for both students and teachers. The College needs to make a formal decision on AI use, establish regulations, and communicate them to all stakeholders. Additionally, teachers may require training on how to integrate AI responsibly into teaching and assessment practices.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

In conclusion, while the aims of the study field are well-defined and aligned with institutional goals, the overall strategy of focusing primarily on tourism is not sufficiently robust given the uncertainties in the sector. Financial sustainability and labor market relevance require careful monitoring and proactive adjustments to secure the future viability of the College.

The College has formally completed a SWOT analysis and integrated some elements into its development planning documents. However, the analysis lacks depth, omits critical aspects such as competition, and shows inconsistencies between identified issues and strategic priorities. Opportunities are not sufficiently addressed in the strategy, and some weaknesses remain unresolved despite being removed from the SWOT. The planning process would benefit from a more evidence-based and comprehensive approach to ensure that strategic decisions are grounded in realistic assessments of the study field.

Overall, while the management structure enables efficient decision-making in a small-scale context, its over-reliance on a single individual and the lack of shared understanding among staff pose risks to long-term stability and quality assurance.

Student assessment at the College is guided by four general principles and supported by clear organizational procedures, including retake and appeal processes. However, the framework lacks explicit reference to ESG principles such as alignment with learning outcomes, student-centeredness, and fairness, and some regulations contain restrictive or inconsistent provisions. Greater flexibility in assessment methods and updates to ensure legal compliance and transparency would strengthen the system and better meet diverse student needs.

The regulatory framework for admission and recognition of prior learning is logical and transparent, and stakeholders are informed. Nevertheless, the inconsistency between the profitability rule and the actual admission practice, combined with the lack of evidence on the functioning of prior learning recognition, limits the ability to fully confirm the effectiveness of these systems.

Overall, while the College has established formal principles and documents on academic integrity, the mechanisms for their observance are not fully effective. Awareness among stakeholders is inconsistent, anti-plagiarism tools are not easily accessible to teachers, and emerging challenges

such as AI use remain unregulated.

Strengths:

- 1) The aims of the study field and study programme are clearly defined, coherent, and aligned with each other and the study field development activities align with the College's strategic objectives.
- 2) There is a demonstrated commitment to sustaining the study programme through previous profits and founders' investments.
- 3) The College has clear, well-written regulations for student admission and recognition of prior learning.
- 4) Admission procedures are transparent and consistently implemented; the students and staff confirmed that the process matches the written rules.
- 5) Decision-making is efficient in a small-scale context, and the Head of the study field ensures smooth day-to-day functioning.
- 6) Administrative and technical support from the Study Department meets operational needs, including study environment preparation and Moodle system management.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Labor market analysis is based on outdated strategies developed before COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, which have significantly changed the tourism sector.
- 2) The study programme is not yet financially sustainable, and failure to achieve self-financing in the short term could threaten its existence.
- 3) Several listed strengths in the SWOT analysis (e.g., provision of materials, bilingual study offering) are basic requirements rather than distinctive advantages.
- 4) The main strategic focus is on research strengthening, while critical issues such as low student numbers and study programme diversification receive less attention. The strategy prioritizes research activities while failing to give equal importance to studies, which are a core function of the institution.
- 5) Inconsistencies exist between the SWOT and reality: some weaknesses (eg. insufficient international partnerships) remain unresolved despite being removed from the SWOT analysis.
- 6) The assessment principles do not explicitly include alignment with learning outcomes, student-centeredness, and fairness, which are core ESG requirements.
- 7) The Study Regulations contain inconsistencies and restrictive provisions, such as denying students the opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes due to financial debt, and lack flexibility in assessment methods.
- 8) Admission requirements are minimal and do not include field-specific criteria, which may affect the quality and preparedness of admitted students.
- 9) No real-life evidence of the recognition of prior learning process functioning, as no applicants have used this option.
- 10) Lack of clarity and shared understanding of roles and procedures among academic and administrative staff and management bodies; written regulations are not consistently translated into shared practice.
- 11) Inconsistent understanding and application of plagiarism prevention practices among academic staff. Teachers lack direct access to plagiarism detection tools and clear procedures for handling detected cases.
- 12) No regulation or shared approach regarding the use of AI tools in studies.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

- 1.2.1. The College has established a publicly available Quality Policy as well as a comprehensive set

of internal regulations that formally define the framework of its internal quality assurance (QA) system. Annex 1.1 of SAR, “List of Main Internal Regulatory Documents and Regulations of Riga Management College”, includes regulations on study programme development and amendment, course description updates, plagiarism prevention, student complaints, recognition of prior learning and academic integrity. These documents demonstrate a clear institutional intention to create a structured QA environment aligned with national requirements and ESG principles.

In addition, following the site visit, the College provided the document “Procedure 1.2.1.5.6. Study Process Organisation”, which describes key study-related processes in a structured and standardised manner (primarily in tabular form). The procedure outlines responsibilities, process sequences and documentation flows related to study organisation and internal quality assurance. While this document further confirms that core processes are formally defined, its content mainly reflects planning and implementation stages, and does not sufficiently demonstrate systematic evaluation of outcomes or structured follow-up actions.

During the site visit, the expert group noted that the College uses multiple feedback mechanisms: systematic end-of-course surveys completed by students, annual satisfaction surveys covering broader study experience, and surveys for academic staff and employers. Site visit meeting with the academic staff confirmed that these instruments are actively used, and at least one lecturer provided a concrete example of adjusting teaching methodology based on course evaluation results. This indicates that elements of quality enhancement are occurring at the level of individual teaching staff. Digital platforms such as Moodle support documentation and communication of course-level QA elements (course descriptions, assessment criteria, independent work requirements), contributing positively to transparency and accessibility.

However, despite the extensive formal regulatory base, the practical functioning, coordination and internal understanding of the QA system could not be demonstrated during the site visit. The SAR states that QA activities are guided by “quality indicators and metrics” and cycles of monitoring (SAR Part I, p. 8). Following the site visit, the College provided an annex to the Development Strategy containing a list of quality indicators. While this confirms that KPIs are formally defined at strategic level, the indicators are mostly descriptive in nature and are not supported by baseline values, target levels or time-bound benchmarks. When the expert group asked the quality manager to clarify how these indicators are used in practice for monitoring and improvement, no evidence was provided to demonstrate systematic tracking of KPI performance over time, comparison against targets, or structured decision-making based on the results. As a result, it remains difficult to assess progress towards strategic objectives or to verify whether improvement actions are triggered by performance data. This indicates that KPI-based monitoring is still at an early stage of development and not yet fully embedded in the internal quality assurance cycle, with management referring primarily to the existence of regulations rather than demonstrating operational “check” and “act” mechanisms supported by measurable evidence.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the College’s QA system is currently focused primarily on the “Plan” and “Do” stages of the quality management cycle, while systematic “Check” and “Act” stages are weakly developed or not yet implemented. As a result, the quality loop is not fully closed, and the use of performance data for evidence-based improvement remains limited.

Site visit meetings also highlighted significant gaps in internal understanding of QA responsibilities. Only the study programme director could partially explain the role of the Methodological commission. Other teaching staff - including an academic who is officially a member of this commission - could not clearly describe its purpose, responsibilities or activities, and reported that they had never received recommendations from this body. This suggests that the methodological commission is either inactive or insufficiently integrated into QA processes.

The QA manager works remotely from abroad and appears to have limited operational involvement in daily QA activities. The site visit meetings indicated that the Director assumes primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with quality standards. Such a setup raises concerns

regarding the institutionalisation of QA responsibilities and the robustness of internal mechanisms for quality assurance, as expected under ESG standards 1.1 and 1.9.

At this early stage of study programme implementation, the students have not yet completed internships and there are no graduates. Therefore, certain types of quality evidence - such as employer evaluations, graduate feedback and employment monitoring - are not yet available. This absence is expected at this stage and does not reflect a deficiency in the system; however, it naturally limits the extent to which ESG 1.7 and 1.9 effectiveness can be evaluated at present. Finally, the expert group observed that in the English-language version of the “Regulation on Academic and Administrative Positions”, students are listed among the categories of personnel. Although this is accepted even by the law, such wording in this particular document could still lead to ambiguity regarding students’ legal status, rights, obligations, or access to institutional systems and data. The experts therefore recommend reviewing the formulation to ensure clarity and to prevent possible misunderstandings in both internal governance and external regulatory contexts.

1.2.2. The College has defined formal procedures for study programme and course development, as outlined in several internal regulations in SAR Annex 1.1. “List of Main Internal Regulatory Documents and Regulations of Riga Management College”. The “Procedure for Submitting and Reviewing Suggestions and Complaints” specifies that course descriptions must be updated at least once per academic year, prepared by the lecturer, reviewed by the study programme director, and submitted for approval to the Methodological Commission. It also requires updated course descriptions to be uploaded to Moodle and stored in the administrative section of the Moodle system. According to site visit meeting with the staff, study courses are updated each semester or academic year by the respective teachers, and these updates are reviewed and approved by the Director. This process appears straightforward and allows for regular updating of course content.

Following the site visit, the College provided an example of an extract from the Methodological Commission meeting minutes (15 September 2025), which confirms that the commission has reviewed study-related issues, including course content, student workload, integration of practical activities, Moodle materials and hospitation planning. The minutes also demonstrate that concrete tasks were assigned to teaching staff and the study programme director, with defined deadlines and follow-up reporting planned at subsequent meetings.

However, while the documentation confirms that the Methodological Commission is operational and engaged in study process matters, the evidence mainly reflects course-level and operational issues. The “Methodological Commission Regulations” assign the commission responsibility for approving course descriptions, reviewing methodological materials, analysing teaching quality, and making proposals for study programme improvements, with at least four meetings per year and mandatory meeting minutes. Nevertheless, the documentation does not demonstrate systematic, programme-level review based on predefined criteria, performance indicators or aggregated data analysis. As a result, although formal review activity exists, the expert group could not verify that study programme development and review are implemented as a structured, cyclical quality assurance process.

The College has established feedback mechanisms that function reliably for student input. End-of-course surveys and an annual student satisfaction survey are systematically administered, and academic staff confirmed that they read and reflect on student feedback. SAR Annex 2.2.1 “Survey result analysis” includes a written summary of student survey results and outlines proposed and planned improvement actions - such as a seminar on communication with international students, review of homework load, and expansion of practical activities.

This demonstrates that student feedback is systematically collected and analysed, and that the College is able to identify areas for improvement. However, at the time of the site visit, the expert group could not verify whether the proposed actions had been implemented or whether their impact had been subsequently evaluated. As a result, while feedback analysis is clearly documented, the

use of student feedback as part of a closed quality improvement loop (“feedback → action → evaluation”) could not yet be fully demonstrated.

Consultations with labour market representatives reportedly took place during initial study programme design, but no written documentation or evidence of stakeholder involvement was provided. As expected for a new study programme, no employer or graduate feedback is yet available, but the College has defined procedures for collecting such feedback at later stages of study programme implementation, including the “Internship Regulations”, which foresee communication with internship providers and evaluation of students’ professional performance during practice, as well as the general framework for surveys of students, graduates and employers described in SAR Annex 2.2.1 “Survey Result Analysis”. These documents provide a formal basis for obtaining labour market feedback once internships are completed and graduates enter employment; however, the practical implementation and effectiveness of these procedures cannot yet be assessed.

Overall, while the College has established student feedback mechanisms that function in practice, and formal procedures for study programme development exist, the expert group could not confirm that programme-level review processes - particularly the methodological commission’s oversight - are implemented effectively or consistently. Improvements currently appear to rely primarily on student feedback and individual lecturer initiative rather than on a structured, institutional study programme review mechanism. As a result, the procedures, while formally defined, are not yet fully demonstrated as efficient and consistently implemented at study programme level.

1.2.3. The College has an internal Procedure for Submitting and Reviewing Suggestions and Complaints, included in its internal regulatory documents. The procedure specifies the available channels for submitting complaints (email, Moodle, in person), requires all complaints to be registered in a dedicated complaints log, and sets a written response deadline of 10 working days, extendable to one month if necessary (Section II, points 4-7). In addition, the Study Regulations explicitly inform students of their right to submit complaints related to student assessment and evaluation procedures. Although these regulations are clearly defined, no complaints register or examples of submitted complaints were provided to the expert group.

According to staff, due to the small student cohort, students most often raise issues informally by approaching the study programme director or head of studies directly. Staff described a supportive environment where students feel comfortable discussing concerns face-to-face. However, site visit meetings indicated that in such cases students do not always receive explicit feedback on whether their concerns have been formally recorded, reviewed, or resulted in concrete changes. In cases of formal or anonymous complaints, staff reported that issues are addressed and improvements implemented, but anonymous submissions do not allow for direct individual feedback. Response times were described informally as “as soon as possible,” and no documented follow-up process was presented.

As no evidence of complaint entries, resolutions, or documented follow-up actions was provided, the expert group could not verify how effectively the formal mechanism is applied in practice. In particular, the absence of documented feedback to students limits transparency and makes it difficult to assess whether complaints lead to systematic improvements.

Overall, while the College appears accessible and responsive to student concerns and fosters a supportive communication culture, the practical functioning of the formal complaints mechanism could not be verified due to the absence of documented evidence demonstrating its use.

1.2.4. The College has established several mechanisms for collecting statistical information related to the study programme. According to the SAR (Part I, Section 1.2), statistical monitoring is formally defined as part of the internal QA system; however, the description provided remains general and does not specify which indicators are monitored or how they are analysed. During the site visit, the

expert group was informed that statistical data are collected by the Study Department and partly by the QA manager, although no written description of this division of responsibilities was provided.

The College submitted Annex 3.1.2 “Statistics - Students”, which contains quantitative information on student admissions and enrolment figures. This annex confirms that basic statistical data are collected; however, it does not include other essential indicators typically used for study programme monitoring, such as dropout rates, academic progression, success rates. Following the visit, the College also provided a document listing quality indicators (KPIs). While this confirms that KPIs are formally defined, the indicators are largely descriptive in nature and are not supported by baseline values, target levels or time-bound benchmarks. As a result, their use for systematic monitoring of performance and progress remains limited. No evidence of systematic tracking of KPI results over time or their use in decision-making was presented to the expert group, and the QA manager was unable to clearly explain how KPI-based monitoring is implemented in practice.

Evidence of data analysis and use of statistics for decision-making remains limited. The only concrete example presented to the experts was the ability to monitor certain aspects of student activity in Moodle, such as engagement with course materials. However, no institutional reports, summaries, dashboards, or documented analyses were provided to illustrate how statistical information is systematically evaluated or used for study programme improvement. Although the SAR (p. 18, 24, 26) states that Annual Self-Assessment Reports of the study field and study programmes are prepared each year, during site visit meetings neither management nor academic staff were able to present such reports or clearly describe their content or use in quality improvement processes.

Mechanisms for obtaining feedback from internal and external stakeholders exist but are not yet fully implemented. Student feedback is regularly collected through end-of-course surveys and an annual satisfaction survey. SAR Annex 2.2.1 “Survey result analysis” documents the results of these surveys and identifies planned improvements, demonstrating an analytical approach to student feedback. Employer feedback is currently informal, obtained through verbal consultations during study programme design and occasional communication with labour market representatives; no written evidence of these consultations was provided to the expert group. Since the study programme is new and no internships or graduates yet exist, employer evaluations of student performance and graduate feedback are understandably not available at this stage. Internship-related feedback mechanisms are defined in the internship regulations, which include structured employer evaluation forms to be used once internships begin (Internship Regulations, pp. 3-5).

1.2.5. The College publishes extensive information about the Tourism Service Organisation short-cycle professional higher education study programme on its website. The study programme description is available in both Latvian and English, which corresponds to the languages of implementation. The information presented includes the study programme title, qualification to be obtained, study forms, duration, study programme volume (120 ECTS), tuition fees, admission requirements, study aims, intended learning outcomes, study methods, internship organisation, and opportunities for further studies. This ensures that applicants and students have access to clear and comprehensive study programme information.

The expert group compared the information published on the website with the data available in the VIIS system and the E-platform, and no inconsistencies were identified. Both national registers contain the required formal data on licensing, implementation language, study programme type, study field and other essential administrative information. The information provided by the College on its website is consistent with the official records and does not contain contradictory or misleading elements in relation to VIIS or the E-platform.

However, the expert group noted one area of concern regarding the Erasmus+ section of the website. Although the College is not yet eligible to participate in Erasmus+ student mobility (as it does not hold an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education), the current presentation of the Erasmus

information in the website may give applicants the impression that mobility opportunities are already available. This creates a risk of misunderstanding and should be clarified to ensure fully accurate and transparent communication.

Overall, the College provides complete and multilingual study programme information, and alignment with national registers is ensured. The only issue requiring correction is the potentially misleading presentation of Erasmus+ mobility information.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The College has developed a formal internal quality assurance system supported by a comprehensive set of internal regulations, including a Quality Policy and procedures for study programme development, course updates, complaints management, and stakeholder feedback. Student feedback mechanisms function well, and improvement actions are documented based on survey results. The College also collects basic descriptive statistics on student cohorts. However, the expert group could not verify the practical functioning of several key QA elements described in the SAR. The methodological commission, which is formally responsible for study programme oversight and quality monitoring, does not appear to operate as defined in the regulations, and only limited evidence of review activity was provided, without demonstrating systematic programme-level oversight and follow-up. KPI-based monitoring referenced in the SAR could not be demonstrated, as neither indicators nor analytical reports were presented. While a complaints procedure exists, its systematic implementation could not be evidenced. Website information is generally comprehensive, but the Erasmus+ section may create a misleading impression regarding the current availability of mobility opportunities. Overall, the QA system is structurally defined but remains at an early stage of implementation, with several essential components not yet fully functioning in practice.

Strengths:

- 1) A comprehensive internal regulatory framework for quality assurance, including defined procedures for study programme development, course updates, and complaints handling.
- 2) Student feedback is systematically collected through end-of-course and annual surveys, and the College has prepared an analytical summary with several planned improvement actions.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Although the Methodological Commission is operational and meeting minutes confirm that study-related issues are discussed, the evidence primarily reflects course-level and operational matters. Systematic, programme-level review based on predefined criteria, performance indicators or aggregated data analysis could not be demonstrated.
- 2) While quality indicators (KPIs) are formally defined in the College's strategic documents, they are largely descriptive and lack baseline values, target levels and time-bound benchmarks. As a result, KPI-based monitoring and its use for systematic performance evaluation and improvement remain limited in practice.
- 3) The complaints mechanism is defined but not systematically used or documented; no complaints register or resolved cases were provided.
- 4) Statistical monitoring is limited to descriptive data and student surveys, with no evidence of systematic analysis or data-driven decision-making.
- 5) The Erasmus+ section of the website may create a potentially misleading impression regarding the current availability of student mobility opportunities.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

- 1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The College has developed a formal quality assurance framework and procedures; however, several key QA mechanisms described in the SAR could not be demonstrated in practice, including programme-level review, KPI monitoring, methodological commission activity, and systematic data analysis. Therefore, the requirement is only partially fulfilled.

- 2 1.1 - The higher education institution/ college has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

A Quality Policy and the core QA procedures (study programme development, course description updates, complaints handling, feedback processes) are formally established and publicly available, fulfilling the requirement (SAR, pp. 9-11).

- 3 1.2 - A mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes of the higher education institution/ college, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection thereof has been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Procedures for study programme development, course approval, and supervision exist and are defined in internal regulations (SAR, pp. 10-11). Following the site visit, the College provided an extract from the minutes of the Methodological Commission as an example of formal review activity. The SAR also describes the role and tasks of the Methodological Commission and provides examples of programme review linked to meeting minutes (SAR, p. 19, 25). However, the evidence remains limited, as the expert group could not verify systematic and regular programme-level supervision and periodic inspection, including clearly documented decisions, consistent review outputs or follow-up actions demonstrating a cyclical quality assurance process. The available documentation primarily reflects isolated or course-level discussions rather than a comprehensive and structured programme review mechanism.

- 4 1.3 - The criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results, which enable reassurance of the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, have been developed and published.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Assessment criteria, evaluation procedures, and learning outcome requirements are published in course descriptions and the Study Regulations; no inconsistencies were identified (SAR, p. 11, pp. 21-22).

- 5 1.4 - Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality have been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Procedures regulating the qualification requirements, recruitment and appointment of academic staff, as well as general provisions related to teaching quality assurance, are defined in internal regulatory documents and were made available to the expert group. These procedures establish formal requirements for academic staff qualifications and outline responsibilities related to teaching performance. Based on the documentation reviewed and site visit meetings conducted during the visit, no deficiencies were identified with regard to the formal existence of internal

procedures for assuring academic staff qualifications and work quality within the scope of this criterion (SAR, p. 12, 37).

- 6 1.5 - The higher education institution/ college ensures the collection and analysis of the information on the study achievements of the students, employment of the graduates, satisfaction of the students with the study programme, efficiency of the work of the academic staff, the study funds available and the disbursements thereof, as well as the key performance indicators of the higher education institution/ college.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Basic student statistics and survey results are collected (e.g., the College states that it maintains a database of aggregated academic performance data and regularly conducts student surveys via Moodle, with information compiled in the database) (SAR, p. 12, p. 35, 70); however, systematic analysis is limited, KPIs/quality indicators referenced in the SAR (e.g., “quality indicators and metrics” and “key performance indicators”) were not demonstrated as implemented in practice (SAR, pp. 8-9, p. 12), and no evidence of structured, data-driven quality monitoring was presented.

- 7 1.6 - The higher education institution/ college ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its quality assurance systems.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Improvement actions were demonstrated at course level (examples of programme/course enhancements based on employers’ recommendations and student questionnaires are described in the SAR) (SAR, p. 25); however, institutional QA processes described in the SAR—such as Methodological Commission work (reviewing/approving course/module descriptions and analysing lecture observations) (SAR, p. 19, p. 25), KPI/quality indicator monitoring (SAR, pp. 8-9), and systematic data management/analysis to support improvement (SAR, p. 12) are not yet functioning as a consistent, evidence-based cycle in practice. While planning and implementation are evident (the SAR describes a cyclical QA approach: “planning - implementation - evaluation - improvement”) (SAR, p. 12), the “check” and “act” stages remain underdeveloped based on the evidence available to the expert group. The college needs to strengthen continuous improvement by systematically collecting meaningful performance data on assessment practices and using these insights to improve.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. As stated in SAR p. 28 the College Board serves as the highest decision-making body for strategic, financial, and operational matters, while the College Director manages daily administration and submits the annual budget for Board approval, which forms the basis for study and research processes.

Funding for Study Field and Study Programme is calculated based on the number of student places and the base cost per place, covering staff salaries, social insurance, infrastructure, technical resources, study programme development, and other operational expenses. Funding sources include tuition fees, income from the College’s economic activities, and contributions from the founders. Tuition fees are regulated by an approved price list, with flexible payment plans and potential discounts for student contributions to governance or other activities, subject to Director and Board approval (SAR Annex 2.1.5, Study Agreement Sample).

SAR (p. 29) provides detailed cost calculations per student, showing consistent cost structures across full-time, part-time intramural, and part-time extramural study modes. Staff salaries account for the largest share (~68%), followed by social contributions (~16%), with the remaining funds

covering infrastructure, technical resources, and study programme development. Total annual costs per student range from approximately €1,657 to €1,686 depending on study mode. According to the information published on the website <https://college.lv/en/tuition-fees/>, the tuition fee ranges from EUR 1,900 to EUR 2,700 per year, depending on the type and language of the study programme. Tuition fee reductions are also available.

The College also has a defined and implemented system for supporting scientific research. Students may receive up to €100 per year, and academic staff up to €350 per year, to support conference participation or publication costs, ensuring direct and effective funding for research activities (SAR, HEI Other Annexes: Regulations on Scientific Research Activities). During the site visit meeting, the teaching staff also expressed the opinion that the amount of funding is not sufficient and most often the amounts required for research are higher.

A separate funding scheme is also available for students' research activities, including a student scientific paper competition governed by separate regulations, with three prize-winning places receiving monetary awards, thereby motivating students to engage in research through their study courses (SAR, HEI Other Annexes: Regulations on the procedure for financing students scientific research activities). Since the study programme has been implemented only for one year, the effectiveness of research support cannot be assessed yet. Discussions during site visit meetings confirmed that students are already involved in research activities in practice. Several positive examples were highlighted, such as student participation in research-focused conferences. During the meeting with the teaching staff it was observed that these initiatives are mainly evident at the level of individual courses or teaching efforts, rather than being systematically and consistently integrated across the entire study field.

Although the College maintains a transparent and functional financial framework that supports both Study Programme delivery and scientific research, and sustains the study programme through past profits and founder contributions, experts caution that heavy reliance on founder contribution poses a strategic risk. Without achieving self-financing in the near term, the sustainability of the Study Field and Study Programme could be compromised.

1.3.2. During the site visit, the expert group observed modern, well-maintained auditoriums and computer classrooms, which the College uses on the basis of a cooperation and premises rental agreement with the Baltic International Academy (BIA) (Agreement No. 04/SNL dated 01 September 2017), valid until 30 September 2026, with possibility to extend (SAR, p.30). The teaching and learning environment is visually appealing and structurally suitable for the needs of the short-cycle study programme. A dedicated computer laboratory equipped with the Amadeus reservation system is available, which is highly relevant for tourism studies and aligns with industry expectations. Sufficient workstations and equipment are provided, and classrooms are accessible to students on a daily basis. Teaching staff have access to the necessary equipment, including computers and presentation tools, although projectors are not available in all classrooms; this does not appear to hinder the study programme's delivery.

The College uses a well-functioning Moodle e-platform, and course descriptions and learning materials are properly uploaded, ensuring accessibility and transparency for students. Regarding the improvement and acquisition of new resources, the process appears to rely primarily on direct communication with the study programme director, as described by staff. While this approach allows responsiveness to individual needs, the expert group did not receive evidence of a structured institutional procedure governing the planning, procurement, and renewal of material, methodological, or technical resources. As a result, it is unclear how resource development is prioritised or how decisions are documented. Furthermore, although current infrastructure is sufficient, additional tourism-specific digital tools and software could further enhance practical training opportunities and strengthen alignment with contemporary industry practices.

However, in a professional study programme in tourism and hospitality, it is recommended to use

simulation based learning to provide realistic experiences for students by engaging them in problem-solving and critical thinking situations within the industry. One example, which is more aimed for hotel management higher education, but partially for tourism service organizing, is HOTS (Hotel Operation Training System) that represents computer-based simulation in hospitality education that allows students to develop managerial skills and make strategic decisions while running a virtual hotel or virtual tourism agency.

Overall, the College's existing infrastructure and digital systems are adequate and support the delivery of the study programme, but the lack of a clearly defined, documented procurement and improvement procedure, together with gaps in specialised learning resources, indicates that the resource development system is not yet fully established.

1.3.3. The College has established access to methodological and informational resources primarily through a rental agreement with the Baltic International Academy (BIA). This agreement provides students and academic staff with access to BIA's library infrastructure, including reading rooms, computers, printing and copying services, and workstations for laptops. The library operates 6 days per week, with extended hours during examination periods, ensuring convenient access for all students.

Library resources include both physical and electronic materials. According to SAR (pp. 33-34) the physical collection contains relevant literature for all study courses, including a significant proportion in English, and regularly receives Latvian and international periodicals. For the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Leisure Organization" the library maintains a collection of 177 items, complemented by 584 items in related fields such as economics, management, marketing, and sociology. This ensures that students have access to the literature necessary to meet the requirements of their study programmes. During the site visit, information was obtained that students are aware of the library's services and accessibility, however, there was no clear evidence that its resources are fully used beyond copying services. A considerable part of the physical collection remains in Russian, which could limit access for international students and is not fully compatible with a Latvian-English language study programme implementation.

According to SAR (pp. 32-34) electronic resources are extensive and include multidisciplinary databases such as EBSCO, SCOPUS, ScienceDirect, and the LNB Digital Library, as well as specialized national databases like Latvijas Vēstnesis, Letonika, iBizness, and LURSOFT. Open-access academic resources provided by the National Library of Latvia further expand the availability of scientific publications and research materials.

The College has implemented a structured procedure for the improvement and updating of methodological resources. At the end of each academic year, BIA Library requests a detailed list of publications and periodicals for the next year, including necessary bibliographic information. In addition, the College actively seeks cooperation with other institutions to enhance its informational base. Notably, a Memorandum of Cooperation with the University of Latvia Library and study excursions to the National Library of Latvia provide students with additional access to resources, training in database use, and opportunities to engage in research activities (SAR pp. 31-34).

While the College's methodological and informational base is largely dependent on external institutions, it ensures that students' needs are met through accessible, relevant, and up-to-date resources. The main challenge remains the limited capacity for independent acquisition and expansion, which can be addressed through continued cooperation, database subscriptions, and EU-funded project support.

It was observed during the site visit that students visit the library primarily to conduct research or to print documents.

1.3.4. According to SAR (p. 35) and based on the information obtained during the site visit the College employs information and communication technology solutions that are appropriate, and

supportive of both in-person and remote learning. The Moodle platform serves as the primary e-learning environment, hosting study materials, assignments, evaluations and methodical and regulatory documents. For remote learning and interactive teaching, MS Teams is used, allowing students and staff to participate in remote lectures.

The students and staff are provided with Microsoft 365 applications, facilitating collaboration, document creation and communication. Academic staff have access to the Moodle Administration section, which includes strategic and quality management documents, course development materials, research support information, methodological resources, and tutorials for Moodle, MS Teams, and Office 365. These tools ensure that staff can efficiently manage courses, monitor student progress and maintain high-quality study processes.

The NEXUS Student Information System further supports the study process by managing student data, tracking academic performance, monitoring lecturer workloads, planning lessons and automating notifications about academic or financial obligations. Communication tools, such as WhatsApp groups and Moodle messaging, foster a student-centered approach by enabling timely interaction between students, faculty and administration. It was observed during the site visit that WhatsApp serves as the main communication tool.

During the site visit, the MOODLE system was demonstrated and an explanation was provided regarding its use by both students and teaching staff.

Overall, the ICT infrastructure is fully suitable for remote learning, providing students with flexible access to study materials, enabling interaction with faculty, and supporting autonomous learning. The combination of Moodle, MS Teams, NEXUS, 365 and other communication tools ensures effective management and communication.

1.3.5. SAR (pp. 36-37) demonstrates that the College has defined, implemented, and followed formal procedures for attracting academic staff in line with the requirements of the Study Field and corresponding Study Programme. Recruitment is regulated by the officially approved Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions, which have been adopted by the College Council <https://college.lv/en/policies-and-rules/>.

Concerning the recruitment process, according to SAR (p. 36) and the “Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions” published on website <https://college.lv/en/policies-and-rules/> academic positions are announced based on proposals from the Study Department and competitions are organized for expiring or vacant positions. The College Council plays a central role in reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and making election decisions through a secret ballot and majority vote. The recruitment process is structured and transparent.

The procedure is compliant with national legislation. The possibility to appoint visiting academic staff without announcing a competition, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions, provides flexibility while remaining within a regulated legal framework. As the recruitment regulations are publicly available on the College’s website, all stakeholders, including potential candidates, are informed about the procedures and requirements.

During the site visit meeting with the academic staff, it was confirmed that despite many teaching staff being visiting lecturers, they are engaged in sustained, long-term collaboration with the College.

It is essential to recognize that, as highlighted in the SWOT analysis of SAR (p. 15), the limited number of elected academic staff represents a key weakness. This may negatively impact their motivation to participate in research and professional development. Furthermore, if student enrollment does not increase, the resulting insufficient workload makes it difficult to justify hiring additional elected staff, which further reinforces the challenges related to staff motivation

Section 3 of the Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions outlines the requirements for academic staff. Since the College offers study programmes in English, it would be reasonable to include a clear English language proficiency requirement. However, the current wording—“Foreign

language knowledge and ability to use it in academic and research work”—is too vague and may allow the hiring of staff without adequate English skills, which is unacceptable given the institution’s English-language study offerings.

1.3.6. SAR (p. 37) demonstrates a systematic and purposeful approach to identifying, supporting, and evaluating the professional and didactic development of the teaching staff at the College. Development needs are determined through a structured quality assurance framework that includes initial assessment of lecturers’ professional competencies prior to employment, regular lecture observations, student surveys after each study course, and analysis of academic outcomes at the end of each semester (SAR, Annex 1.1.-15, Quality Management Policy, Annex 1.1.-14, Quality Assurance System).

While the site visit provided some evidence of positive impacts on study courses—such as updated content and enhanced teaching methodologies—professional development opportunities for academic staff remain very limited and the development of visiting lecturers is not systematically addressed. According to the information obtained during the site visit the internal knowledge sharing helps disseminate insights from professional development activities, the current mechanisms primarily focus on elected staff, leaving visiting lecturers without structured development opportunities.

To provide recommendations for ensuring the quality of studies, a consultative body, the Methodical Committee, has been established (SAR, HEI Other Annexes, Metodiskās komisijas nolikums). During the site visit, it was noted that, although the Methodical Committee includes a representative of visiting lecturers, they generally lack an understanding of the organization, directions, and tasks of the Committee. Relevant information, including requirements and evaluations, is made available through Moodle.

1.3.7. According to SAR (p. 38) the academic and research workload of the teaching staff is balanced, which was also confirmed during the site visit meetings. A total of 14 staff members are involved in the implementation of the “Tourism Services Organization” study programme, with 3 holding doctoral degrees and 11 holding master’s degrees. Staff are assigned to courses based on their research directions and expertise, ensuring alignment between teaching responsibilities and academic competence. The academic and research workload is determined in accordance with the College’s internal “Regulations on Academic Staff Remuneration,” which provide a framework for workload allocation and remuneration for each activity (SAR, HEI Other Annexes: Noteikumi par akadēmiskā personāla darba samaksu).

Due to the small number of student groups in the current study plan, staff have been working part-time during the reporting period, indicating that teaching responsibilities are adapted to actual student numbers. Academic staff are also involved in research activities, including supervising student research projects and participating in national and international scientific conferences, with the knowledge gained applied to update study courses. For example, a joint conference with the Social Integration State Agency College is planned for the 2025/2026 academic year, where both lecturers and students will present publications, integrating research with teaching.

Although administrative workload is not explicitly detailed, the structured remuneration and workload regulations imply that all teaching, research, and administrative duties are considered in workload planning. Supporting evidence, including staff qualifications, appointment status, course assignments, and language proficiency, is provided in SAR (Annexes 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.).

1.3.8. The College has identified the necessary support for students and established a support system to meet their needs. Student support is purposefully organized and planned in cooperation with the Student Council, allowing student needs to be identified, suggestions to be considered, and solutions to be agreed upon.

According to SAR (pp. 38-39) students have access to psychological support through a cooperation agreement with the Department of Sociology and Psychology at Riga Stradiņš University. This support addresses emotional, cognitive, and communication difficulties and promotes personal development. International students also benefit from these services to facilitate acclimatization to the new environment.

The college provides additional support for international students through long-term cooperation with the NGO Shelter Safe House". This includes conversational Latvian language clubs for beginners and advanced students, free translation services, legal assistance, and guidance in addressing social issues. Housing support is also provided before arrival, for example, through a cooperation agreement with Duck Republik SIA (SAR, Annex 2.5.1. List of cooperation agreements).

Support is continuous from the initial interest in the College through matriculation and throughout students' studies. Local applicants receive informational support from the Study Department, while international applicants are assisted by the External Relations Officer via phone, email, WhatsApp, and video conferencing. Both full-time and part-time students receive information support from the Study Process Coordinator, including in-person consultations, phone correspondence, and group communication via WhatsApp. At the beginning of each semester, informational meetings are organized for each group to explain the semester plan and key assignments.

The College ensures accessibility for students with mobility impairments by conducting its study process in the premises of the Baltic International Academy. The college also supports student career development through membership in the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Additional student engagement and cultural integration support are provided through activities organized by the College, such as visits to museums, National library and excursions to the other cities, which help international students better understand Latvia and its history.

During the site visit it was confirmed that the relationship between students and the college management and academic staff is based on mutual respect and trust.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The College has a transparent and functional financial management system that ensures effective allocation of resources for staff salaries, infrastructure, programme development, and operational needs. Research activities are actively supported through grants, conference funding, and student research competitions, fostering engagement and enhancing the study process. Access to methodological and informational resources is secured through cooperation with the Baltic International Academy and other partners, complemented by structured procedures for updating library resources and collaborations such as the Memorandum with the University of Latvia Library.

A robust ICT infrastructure, including Moodle, MS Teams, Microsoft 365, and the NEXUS Student Information System, supports both in-person and distance learning, enabling efficient course management, progress monitoring, and communication. Academic staff recruitment follows formal, transparent, and legally compliant procedures, while workload and remuneration regulations ensure balanced teaching and research responsibilities. Additionally, the College provides a comprehensive student support system addressing academic, psychological, social, and practical needs, ensuring continuity from admission through graduation.

Strengths:

- 1) Flexible tuition fee policies and incentive schemes, such as student research competitions, foster student participation, engagement, and motivation.
- 2) The College actively supplements resources through partnerships with external institutions, study excursions, and training in database usage, ensuring access to up-to-date materials and research skills development.
- 3) The integration of multiple ICT tools allows flexible access to study materials, promotes

interactive and autonomous learning, and fosters timely communication between students, faculty, and administration, ensuring a student-centered study process.

4) Support measures are structured and inclusive, including psychological services, language and integration support for international students, housing assistance, accessibility for students with mobility impairments, career development opportunities and active engagement in cultural and educational activities

Weaknesses:

1) Heavy reliance on founder contribution poses a strategic risk, as fluctuations could impact financial sustainability and the continuation of the whole institution. Dependence on past profits and founder contributions limits long-term financial independence and reduces the sustainability of the College.

2) A significant portion of the physical collection of the library materials is in Russian, which may restrict accessibility for international students and is not fully aligned with the Latvian-English language implementation.

3) Although development needs are identified, didactic training is limited and not consistently available, especially for visiting lecturers.

4) Despite transparent recruitment procedures, the College relies heavily on visiting lecturers due to a limited number of elected academic staff, which weakens institutional continuity, staff motivation, and long-term academic development.

5) The English language proficiency requirement for teaching staff is insufficiently defined, as the current vague wording may allow the recruitment of staff without adequate English skills despite the College offering study programmes in English.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. The alignment between the study field's research directions and the development goals of the College is established at the level of institutional documentation. The RMC Development Strategy 2023-2028 defines priority research areas such as sustainable tourism, digitalisation, competitiveness, marketing and workforce development, which form the strategic framework for research activities at the College. These priorities are reflected in the Self-Evaluation Report, where the research topics of the teaching staff are described as focusing on themes relevant to the tourism sector, including sustainability, regional tourism development, consumer behaviour, smart tourism and labour market dynamics (SAR, pp. 40-48).

This alignment is further supported by the internal regulatory framework. The Regulation of the Research Division and the Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College define research as a structured institutional function and explicitly link it to applied, industry-relevant inquiry, cooperation with external partners and participation in scientific events. Together, these regulations demonstrate that research directions are formally defined, institutionally anchored and intended to support both the College's development goals and the needs of the tourism industry.

However, evidence from the site visit meetings indicates a gap between the formal definition of research directions and their practical internalisation within the study field. During meetings with teaching staff and the study programme director, it became evident that the study field's research directions are not articulated as a shared and clearly formulated point of reference guiding research activities in everyday academic practice. This indicates that, although research priorities are defined at the institutional level, they are not yet sufficiently communicated or operationalised within the study field itself.

At the same time, during meetings with employers, relevant research needs in the tourism sector were clearly discussed, including cross-border tourism, tourism digitalisation and the application of

artificial intelligence. These themes correspond broadly to the research areas defined in the RMC Development Strategy 2023–2028 and described in the SAR (pp. 40–48), confirming that the strategic orientation of research is relevant to industry needs, even if this relevance is not consistently reflected in the internal articulation of research directions within the study field.

Overall, the available evidence confirms that the study field's research directions correspond to College's development goals and are relevant to the tourism industry at the level of institutional strategy and formal regulation (SAR, pp. 40–48; RMC Development Strategy 2023–2028; Regulation of the Research Division; Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College). Nevertheless, discussions during site visit meetings with management of the college, teaching staff and employers indicate that this alignment is not yet consistently reflected in a shared understanding within the study field, pointing to a need for clearer internal communication and more explicit operationalisation of research directions in practice.

1.4.2. The connection between scientific and applied research and the study process within the study field is described in the Self-Assessment Report as intentional and structured. According to the SAR, research is integrated into the study process progressively, with students initially developing methodological competences and later engaging in independent applied research, particularly within qualification work (SAR, pp. 42–43). This indicates a conceptual model in which research is positioned as an integral component of learning rather than as a parallel or separate activity. This approach is supported by the institutional regulatory framework. The Regulation of the Research Division and the Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College assign clear responsibility for supporting research-based learning, coordinating applied research activities and promoting participation in scientific events. These regulations establish structural mechanisms through which research activities and outcomes can be linked to teaching and learning, thereby providing a formal basis for integrating research into the study process.

According to the SAR, teaching staff draw on their research experience when supervising qualification papers and designing study tasks that reflect current developments in the tourism sector (SAR, p. 46). The SAR further refers to student participation in data collection, employer-oriented applied research tasks and involvement in academic events as key forms of research integration within the study process (SAR, pp. 46–48). While the SAR does not provide detailed examples of how specific research findings systematically modify course content across the study field, it presents a general framework in which research-based and research-informed learning is intended to be embedded at different stages of study.

Evidence from the site visit meetings confirms the existence of this framework but also reveals limitations in its practical implementation. During the site visit meeting with teaching staff, it was acknowledged that institutional support for research exists; however, it was difficult to clearly demonstrate how student involvement in research is implemented consistently across courses within the study process. This suggests that, although research integration is formally defined and structurally supported, its application in everyday teaching practice varies and is not always explicitly articulated.

Overall, the available evidence indicates that the integration of research into the study process is logically conceived and institutionally supported through formal regulations and study requirements (SAR, pp. 42–48; Regulation of the Research Division; Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College). At the same time, discussions during site visit meetings point to a need for clearer and more systematic implementation of research-based learning practices across the study field, particularly with regard to the consistent involvement of students in research activities within regular coursework.

1.4.3. The SAR and the College's internal regulations together indicate that international cooperation in scientific and applied research is formally established and structurally supported at Riga

Management College. The SAR describes academic staff participation in international conferences, joint events and cooperation with foreign partners as part of the study field's research activity (SAR, pp. 48-49). These activities demonstrate that the study field does not operate in isolation and that staff maintain regular contact with the wider academic and professional community beyond Latvia. The institutional regulatory framework significantly strengthens these claims. The Regulation of the Research Division and the Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College explicitly mandate cooperation with foreign higher education institutions and research organisations, participation in international conferences and dissemination of research in international fora. These obligations signal a deliberate institutional commitment to internationalisation of research, rather than occasional or opportunistic engagement. In this respect, international cooperation is not only permitted but structurally embedded as part of academic staff responsibilities and research processes.

The List of Cooperation Agreements shows that the College has a set of formal partnerships with foreign higher education institutions. While these agreements vary in depth and not all explicitly refer to research, their existence provides a framework through which international research cooperation can be developed. The SAR suggests that this framework is being used in practice, as staff participate in cross-border academic events and maintain professional relationships relevant to the study field's themes.

At the same time, the SAR provides limited detailed evidence of long-term or thematic international research projects within the study field. The cooperation appears more strongly expressed in international conferences and professional networks than in structured multi-year joint research initiatives. This does not undermine the existence of international cooperation but indicates an area where the study field could enhance its strategic development by deepening and formalising research collaborations.

Overall, the available documentation shows that the study field ensures international cooperation through staff participation in international academic activities, a regulatory framework that prioritises such cooperation and a network of agreements that provide avenues for collaboration. While the SAR would benefit from more concrete examples of sustained joint research output, the structural conditions and demonstrated engagement indicate that international cooperation is present and is being purposefully developed.

1.4.4. The SAR indicates that College has established a set of formal mechanisms to support and organise the involvement of teaching staff in scientific and applied research within the study field (SAR, pp. 40-48). A review of the College's internal regulatory documents confirms that these mechanisms are institutionally defined and form a structured framework intended to promote teaching staff participation in research activities.

A central element of this framework is the Regulation of the Research Division, which assigns a dedicated structural unit responsibility for coordinating research processes, facilitating cooperation with external partners, supporting teaching staff and organising research-related activities, including conferences and seminars. In addition, the Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College defines research as an integral part of teaching staff duties, requiring engagement in research activities, dissemination of research results and integration of research into academic work. Together, these regulations demonstrate that teaching staff involvement in research is formally embedded in institutional processes and professional responsibilities.

The functioning of these mechanisms is supported by the College's remuneration system, which recognises research as an integral part of academic work. The Regulations on the Remuneration of Academic Staff allocate paid workload hours for specific research-related activities, including participation in international scientific conferences and the preparation of publications. This approach provides structural incentives for teaching staff to engage in scientific and applied research and goes beyond purely declarative expectations.

At the same time, discussions during site visit meetings revealed limitations in the practical effectiveness of these mechanisms. Although teaching staff confirmed that research support measures are formally available, it was not always clear to what extent these opportunities are used in a systematic and consistent manner across the study field. Moreover, site visit meetings (meeting with teaching staff; meeting with study programme director) identified cases where teaching staff publications appeared in journals with predatory or borderline predatory characteristics, such as Sustainability, which raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms guiding research dissemination and the selection of appropriate publication outlets.

Evidence presented in the SAR confirms that teaching staff participate in conferences, engage in applied research and contribute to publications related to the study field (SAR, pp. 46–48). However, when considered together with the findings from the site visit meetings, this suggests that while the mechanisms for involving teaching staff in research are clearly established and accessible, their efficiency in ensuring consistently high-quality research outputs varies in practice.

Overall, the College has developed a coherent and institutionally embedded framework for involving teaching staff in scientific and applied research, supported by clear regulations, organisational structures and financial incentives (SAR, pp. 40–48; Regulation of the Research Division; Regulation on Scientific Research at Riga Management College; Regulations on the Remuneration of Academic Staff; Strategy Implementation Control Card). Nevertheless, site visit meetings indicate that strengthening quality assurance related to research outputs and promoting more systematic use of existing support mechanisms would enhance the overall effectiveness of this framework.

Still, a strong international partner is required to support scientific and applied research of the academic staff, particularly on research topics that represent current interest of the business sector like: personalization and customization in tourism, digital transformation in tourism and higher education (AI, Big data, Virtual reality, Augmented reality), post-pandemic adaptation, strategic solutions in the context of tourism labor market trends, climate action and sustainability in tourism, etc.

1.4.5. The SAR describes student involvement in scientific and applied research within the study field through participation in data collection, empirical tasks, qualification paper research and research-related academic events (SAR, pp. 46–48). These forms of involvement indicate that research activities are incorporated into the study process and that students are introduced to research practices during their studies.

At the institutional level, the College has established structured mechanisms to promote student involvement in research. Student research activities are formally recognised and supported through an institutional framework that enables participation in research-related activities and provides organisational support for student research initiatives. This framework is complemented by the Student Scientific Paper Competition, which offers a structured format for student research with defined evaluation procedures, recognition mechanisms and incentives, thereby encouraging regular student engagement in research activities.

Discussions during site visit meetings confirmed that student involvement in research is already taking place in practice. Good examples were discussed, including student participation in research-related conferences and the integration of research activities into certain study courses (meeting with teaching staff). At the same time, it was noted that these practices are currently more visible at the level of individual courses and teaching initiatives rather than being uniformly embedded across the study field.

Taking into account that the study programme has been implemented for only one full academic year, this stage of development is considered reasonable. Overall, the College has established functional mechanisms to promote student engagement in scientific and applied research, providing students with genuine opportunities to participate in research activities, while further consolidation of these practices at the study field level can be expected as the study programme continues to

mature.

1.4.6. The SAR indicates that several modern elements are integrated into the study process within the study field at the College, including the use of digital learning environments and sector-specific tourism technologies (SAR, pp. 33-36; 52-53). These elements reflect an effort to align the study process with contemporary educational practices and developments in the tourism sector.

In addition, the SAR refers to the use of applied research tasks and employer-based assignments in multiple courses, which introduce practice-oriented learning approaches and connect studies with real-world professional contexts (SAR, pp. 46-48). In the context of a professionally oriented study field, such approaches may be regarded as innovative, as they link learning outcomes with applied problem-solving and industry relevance.

Discussions during the site visit meetings provided limited additional evidence regarding innovative solutions beyond what is described in the SAR. Teaching staff referred to the use of innovative approaches only in general terms, without identifying specific innovative teaching methods. Moreover, such innovative methods are not explicitly reflected in course descriptions, indicating that innovation is largely dependent on individual teaching practices rather than being systematically articulated or implemented at the study field level.

Overall, the available evidence indicates that certain elements potentially related to innovative solutions are present in the study field, primarily through the use of digital learning environments and applied, employer-oriented assignments (SAR, pp. 33-36; 46-48; 52-53). However, the documentation and discussions during site visit meetings provide limited grounds for concluding that these elements constitute clearly defined or systematically implemented innovative solutions with a demonstrable impact at the study field level at this stage.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The analysis indicates that the research directions of the study field are aligned with College's development goals and correspond to the needs of the tourism industry, as reflected in institutional strategies, internal regulations and the SAR. These directions provide a formal framework for research activity within the study field.

Scientific and applied research is connected to the study process through qualification work, applied tasks and research-related learning activities, and this connection is institutionally supported. Research is positioned as an integral component of the study process, with opportunities for students to engage in research activities during their studies.

International cooperation in scientific and applied research is ensured through regulatory provisions, participation of teaching staff in international research events and an institutional network of cooperation agreements. International research cooperation is primarily reflected in academic exchange and research dissemination activities.

The institution has developed mechanisms to support the involvement of teaching staff in research, including organisational structures, remuneration provisions and dedicated funding instruments. These mechanisms create formal conditions for teaching staff participation in scientific and applied research.

Student involvement in research is supported through institutional mechanisms such as targeted funding, structured academic competitions and integration of research activities into selected courses. Students have opportunities to participate in research-related activities, including applied research and academic events.

Innovative elements are applied in the study field through the use of digital learning environments, blended learning formats and applied, employer-oriented assignments. These elements contribute to the organisation of the study process and reflect contemporary educational and sectoral developments.

Strengths:

- 1) The College has an established and functioning research management framework, including a Regulation of the Research Division, a Regulation on Scientific Research and remuneration rules that allocate paid hours for research activities, all of which staff confirmed as known and accessible.
- 2) The institution provides clearly structured and operational mechanisms for student involvement in research, including a dedicated funding scheme for student research activities and an annual student scientific paper competition.
- 3) The College engages in practical cooperation with external partners, including jointly organised conferences with institutions such as SIVA and Riga Nordic University, as evidenced both in documentation and during site visit meetings.
- 4) Employers articulated clear and specific research needs—such as cross-border tourism, tourism digitalisation and AI applications—that align with thematic areas referenced in institutional documents, demonstrating good potential alignment between the College activity and sector expectations.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Defined research directions are not consistently translated into practice: while research directions are formally established at the study field level, neither the study programme director nor teaching staff were able to clearly articulate how these directions are operationalised in their own research activities.
- 2) Uneven involvement of teaching staff in research activities: not all teaching staff are actively engaged in scientific or applied research, which is also reflected in the limited and concentrated publication output; this reduces the overall research capacity of the study field.
- 3) Applied research in cooperation with industry is limited: although employers expressed clear interest in applied research topics, systematic, industry-commissioned applied research activities within the study field are not yet established.
- 4) Quality assurance of research dissemination requires strengthening: evidence of publications in predatory or borderline journals indicates a need for clearer institutional guidance on appropriate publication venues and the use of research support mechanisms.
- 5) Innovative solutions linked to research remain limited in scope: while digital tools and practice-oriented tasks are used in teaching, research-based innovation in the study process is still developing and has not yet produced a clearly distinctive impact at the study field level.
- 6) The integration of research into the study process is not applied consistently across all study courses.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

- 1 R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study field has established a formal framework for scientific and applied research, including defined research directions, support mechanisms and student involvement opportunities.

However, applied research—particularly in cooperation with industry—is still at an early and fragmented stage, and research practices are unevenly implemented across the study field.

Therefore, the current level of development partially corresponds to the expected level for scientific and applied research in a professionally oriented study field.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1. The College cooperates with the institutions from Latvia (higher education institutions/colleges, employers, employers' organisations, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, scientific institutes, etc.) within the framework of the study field, and such cooperation contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes. For example, the College is a member of the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LTRK), Latvian College Association (LCA), Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia - LSUA and has cooperation agreement with the Academic Library of the University of Latvia (SAR, p. 49). Indirectly, the College cooperates with the Employers' Confederation of Latvia. The cooperation partners are selected in view of the specific features of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

In some of the institutions students may benefit from internship placements, job opportunities, guest lectures, and study tours. Cooperation includes perceiving labor market trends with a tendency to jointly organize events for students providing them company visits. During the site visit of the experts' team, it was said that suggestions from employers are discussed in the Methodological Commission meetings. But, during the site visit meeting, academic staff members (as well students) did not have a clear idea about the tasks and the role of the Methodological Commission.

Visiting lectures, seminars, and field trips to tourism-related companies and organizations are promoted. Cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions from Latvia were also signed - Baltic International Academy, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, SIA "Hotel School" etc (List of Cooperation Agreements, Annex 2.5.1.).

However, recognition of the College among employees in tourism and hospitality is unclear, which was also noticeable during the site visit. As described in SWOT analysis given in the Internationalization strategy 2023-2028 (p. 6) international recognition of the institution is weak, while there are limited internship opportunities for international students who do not (yet) speak Latvian, but English. Accordingly, the College tends to collaborate with educational consultancy agencies (for instance SIA "Education Bridge") to attract the students from different countries and accordingly increase its recognition. There is a need for stronger cooperation with various tourism associations.

1.5.2. According to the Internationalization Strategy 2023 - 2028, as well as the discussion with management of the College during the site visit, the institution is dedicated to both - the policy and the idea of internationalization as one key areas for improvement.

It is indicated that the College "currently cooperates under agreements with B.H.M.S. Business and Hotel Management School - Switzerland, City Vinity College Nicosia - Cyprus, and College of Applied Sciences Lavoslav Ružička - Croatia" (Internationalization Strategy 2023 - 2028, p. 11). As given in SWOT analysis of Riga Management College Development Strategy 2023-2028, the institution faces difficulties in establishing and maintaining long-term international partnerships. New partnerships with higher education institutions from abroad are needed to provide an international education environment and prestige. Also, most scientific projects nowadays do not remain nationally-bound, thus collaboration and relevant partnership with institutions from abroad is required. In the existing network, City Unity College Nicosia, Cyprus represents permanent partners for cooperation in education and science (List of Cooperation Agreements, Annex 2.5.1., SAR), which is not sufficient, particularly related to the need for joint scientific research activities with foreign colleagues from partner institutions. Regarding the international employers and internship providers, for instance, in 2024, the College signed internship agreements with the Algoos Study Work and Travel INC in Romania, which is in line with the College efforts given in the internationalization strategy. Criteria to accept partnership proposals are not clearly explained to experts' team during the site visit, apart from aim given in Internationalization strategy 2023-2028 (p. 11) to "Establish at least two new networking and partnership projects annually.

During the development of the "Tourism Service Organization" study programme (2023-2024), few

professors from the UK, Cyprus, and India took part in its development. Two professors of RMC have had mobility at the Vilnius University of Applied Sciences in 2025 (SAR Annex 2.5.4), within the framework of the Nordplus Adult 2025. One professor has had mobility to Ireland organized by the Latvian Colleges Association.

There is an interest and initiative for cooperation with various higher education institutions abroad, but implementation of the framework of Erasmus+ mobility is not yet possible since they are not members of Erasmus+ Charter. According to SAR Annex 2.6.2. - Report on the Implementation of Recommendations for the Study Programme "Tourism Service Management", application for the Erasmus Charter has been submitted, but was rejected based on the fact that Erasmus + Charter is only possible after completing the accreditation procedure of the study field. In the site visit meeting with the College's management, interest for cooperation with Ukrainian partner institutions was underlined. Further efforts in international cooperation are required to ensure knowledge transfer.

The College has not yet evaluated joining the UN TedQual network to get access to a prestigious community of educational, training and research institutions in the tourism sector.

1.5.3. Strategic partnerships of the College with institutions from abroad are aimed at "knowledge and experience exchange, joint program development, third-party funding acquisition, international benchmarking, and network building" (Internationalisation Strategy 2023-2028, p.11.). To attract foreign students and academic staff, the College posts advertisements on the College's website. The "Tourism Service Organisation" study programme is given on the College's website in Latvian and English.

Also, new designs for the College website have been developed and a new visual identity (the logo etc.) tends to enhance the College's recognition. In 2024/2025, there were 9 students (6 from India, 1 from Cameroon, 1 from Kazakhstan, 1 from Nigeria) and no foreign academic staff (SAR Annex 2.5.2.). In 2025/2026, there are 22 students (6 students from India, 3 from Cameroon, 4 from Nigeria, 1 from Kazakhstan, 4 from Pakistan, 2 from Uzbekistan, 1 from Philippines and 1 from Sri Lanka). Using social networks (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) the College tends to attract students. Based on Statistical data on enrolled students (SAR Annex 2.3.1.2.), there were 25 international students in the academic year 2025/26, while only 4 students from Latvia which is far away from planned local and international student ratios (40/60).

During the site visit meetings with students and teaching staff, HEI from Ukraine are mentioned as potential partners. There are further opportunities with HEI and business representatives from Estonia and Lithuania. The staff underlined Skola 2025, the job fair at Teika Quarter in May 2025, and the exhibition at the Baltic Council for International Education in Riga in March 2025, as events they took part in for searching partners. According to the site visit meetings and SAR, the College demonstrates only a minimal level of teacher and student mobility, which currently relies mainly on individual staff contacts and participation in a limited number of project-based initiatives. This approach does not ensure systematic, sustainable or strategically planned international mobility opportunities for the wider academic community.

Although the application for Erasmus Charter has been submitted, the College students and staff cannot yet take part in Erasmus+ mobility. But, the presentation on the website gives the impression that Erasmus+ mobilities for students are available (see also 1.2.5), which may cause a wrong impression among the students. Ambiguity can hurt credibility and confuse potential students.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Cooperation with various institutions in Latvia is established. Cooperation in the form of internships is appropriately planned, while employers are ready to accept international students for internship. Unappropriated ratio between foreign and domestic students with foreign students dominating. The

College website publishes advertisements to attract students's enrollment. Students and teaching staff outgoing mobility is very limited or inappropriately represented.

Strengths:

- 1) Existing cooperation with employers, employers' organizations, higher education institutions in Latvia, provide some internship placement, job opportunities, potential for applied research etc.
- 2) Employers are ready to accept international students for internships.

Weaknesses:

- 1) A limited number of teachers are involved in the applied research projects with international partners.
- 2) The ratio between Latvian and foreign students is problematic with foreign students' domination.
- 3) No regular involvement of Latvian employers in delivering guest lectures ensures the sharing of practical experience.
- 4) Limited cooperation with institutions abroad, the College is not internationally recognised in the tourism sector
- 5) The College has very limited teacher and student mobility, largely dependent on individual contacts and occasional project-based activities.
- 6) The Erasmus Charter is not available for the staff and students and the information on the webpage about this is misleading.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

- 1 R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The College cooperates with different institutions from Latvia and has established a formal framework for internationalisation - Internationalization strategy 2023–2028. However, lack of students' and staff mobility influences that current status partially corresponds to the expected level of internationalisation.

1.6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures

Analysis

1.6. In the previous assessment procedure related to the licensing of the study programme "Tourism Services Organisation", a set of recommendations was issued to support the development of the study programme and the study field. The implementation of these recommendations has been analysed by the institution and reviewed by the experts during the site visit.

The recommendations issued in the licensing procedure were as follows:

- * to prepare study materials prior to the implementation of the study programme;
- * to ensure that study-related information and materials are available in English in the Moodle environment;
- * to identify, in cooperation with the industry, potential commissioned research needs and applied research directions;
- * to ensure the planned proportion of local and international students (40/60), as defined by the institution;
- * to obtain the Erasmus Charter;
- * to ensure sufficient internship placement capacity for international students;

- * to develop cooperation with industry and academic partners in Lithuania and Estonia;
- * to identify potential solutions to ensure financial sustainability in the event that projected student intake is not achieved.

The recommendations related to the preparation of study materials and the availability of study-related information in English have been fully implemented. During the site visit and facility tour, experts were shown developed study courses in the Moodle environment, including structured learning materials aligned with course descriptions, as well as course information available in both Latvian and English.

The recommendation to identify applied research needs in cooperation with the industry has been partially implemented. The SAR refers to a study analysing labour market demand for tourism graduates (SAR, p. 55). This activity was also discussed during meetings with teaching staff and employers (meetings during the site visit). At the same time, site visit meetings confirmed that applied, industry-commissioned research within the study field is still at an early stage, involves a limited number of teaching staff and is not yet systematically organised in line with the applied research needs articulated by employers.

The recommendation to ensure the planned proportion of local and international students (40/60) has not been implemented. According to the statistical data on enrolled students, in the academic year 2024/2025 international students constituted approximately 71,4% of total enrolment, while local students accounted for about 28,6%. In the academic year 2025/2026, international students constituted approximately 84%, while local students accounted for 16% (SAR Annex 2.3.1.2: Statistical data on enrolled students). During meetings with management it was confirmed that marketing and recruitment activities have been carried out; however, these efforts have not resulted in increased local student enrolment (meeting during the site visit). Management explained that local applicants are hesitant to enrol in a study programme that has not yet been accredited, whereas international student recruitment has not been similarly affected.

The recommendation to obtain the Erasmus Charter is in the process of implementation. During meetings with management, the study programme director and teaching staff, it was confirmed that the institution plans to apply for the Erasmus Charter after accreditation of the study field, as accreditation is a prerequisite for obtaining the Charter (meeting during the site visit).

The recommendation to ensure sufficient internship placement capacity for international students has been partially implemented. During meetings with employers, several representatives expressed a general willingness to accept international students for internships; however, this willingness was often conditional upon applicants having at least a minimum level of Latvian language proficiency (meeting during the site visit). Moreover, as internships have not yet commenced, this willingness has not been tested in practice. While no immediate capacity constraints were identified given the current number of international students, experts note that the practical feasibility of internship placements may become a significant challenge if international student enrolment increases.

The recommendation to develop cooperation with industry and academic partners in Lithuania and Estonia has been partially implemented. Cooperation with Lithuanian partners has been initiated, including participation in the Nordplus Adult 2025 project and a visit to Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences, during which potential cooperation opportunities were discussed (SAR, p. 53). During meetings with management and teaching staff, cooperation with Estonian partners was described as being at an exploratory stage, with no concrete activities implemented so far (meeting during the site visit).

Finally, the recommendation to identify potential solutions to ensure financial sustainability in the event that projected student intake is not achieved has been partially implemented. During site visit meetings with management and the study programme director it was confirmed that additional income-generating activities, such as paid courses and seminars, have been considered, although they have not generated significant additional income. At the same time, the institution currently

maintains financial stability through tuition income, accumulated profit from previous years. The experts therefore consider this recommendation to remain relevant as a preventive measure, depending on future enrolment trends.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The evaluation shows that the recommendations related to the preparation of study materials and the availability of study-related information in English have been fully implemented. These measures were confirmed during the site visit and ensure that the study process is supported by accessible and appropriately prepared learning resources.

A number of recommendations are currently in the process of implementation and are constrained by objective conditions. In particular, the acquisition of the Erasmus Charter cannot be completed prior to the accreditation of the study field. At the same time, site visit meetings confirmed that the institution is aware of this requirement and plans to apply for the Charter immediately after accreditation. Similarly, measures aimed at diversifying income sources have been considered and initiated, although their practical relevance depends on future enrollment trends.

Several recommendations have been partially implemented and remain relevant development priorities. These include the systematic development of applied research in cooperation with industry, the planned proportion of local and international students, and the expansion of cooperation with academic and industry partners in the Baltic region. While initial steps have been taken in these areas, site visit meetings and available data indicate that further, more consistent implementation is required to fully achieve the intended outcomes.

Strengths:

1) Study materials have been prepared and are available in the Moodle environment also in English, which demonstrates the institution's ability to fully implement concrete and operational recommendations related to the study process.

Weaknesses:

1) Cooperation with industry in the field of applied research remains at an early development stage, with limited evidence of systematically implemented, industry-commissioned applied research aligned with defined research directions.

2) The planned proportion of local and international students has not been achieved; the study programme is currently dominated by international students, while the number of local students remains very low.

3) Cooperation with academic and industry partners in Lithuania and Estonia is still in an initial, exploratory phase, with concrete activities implemented only to a limited extent and requiring further consolidation.

4) Although the institution has identified potential measures to ensure financial sustainability if projected student intake is not achieved, these measures remain largely conceptual and have not yet resulted in effective, diversified income streams beyond tuition fees.

Assessment of the requirement [4]

- 1 R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Several recommendations from the previous assessment procedures have been implemented, while others remain only partially implemented or are still in progress. In particular, the planned proportion of local and international students has not been achieved, and cooperation with

industry and Baltic partners is still developing, whereas some recommendations are constrained by objective regulatory conditions.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1. Update labor market analysis to reflect post-COVID and geopolitical realities yearly and systematically integrate employer feedback.
2. For the next academic year, develop a clear financial plan with realistic student recruitment targets and alternative revenue streams to ensure sustainability.
3. Ensure consistency between SWOT findings and actual conditions in next SWOT; unresolved weaknesses should remain visible until addressed.
4. Ensure balanced strategic priorities in the updated strategy (within two years) by giving equal emphasis to studies alongside research activities, including clear objectives for improving teaching quality and student experience.
5. For the next academic year revise the assessment principles and procedures to explicitly incorporate alignment with learning outcomes, student-centeredness, and fairness, ensuring compliance with ESG standards.
6. Update the Study Regulations and procedure within a year concerning the incongruity between student's debt and taking the test and other issues in students' assessment systems.
7. Review admission requirements to ensure they include criteria that reflect the specific competencies needed for the study field before the next admission period.
8. Actively promote and test the recognition of prior learning process to verify its functionality and gather feedback for improvement.
9. Improve internal communication and provide regular training to ensure all staff understand procedures, roles, and decision-making processes.
10. Increase awareness of academic integrity policies through systematic communication and training for both staff and students. Before the next academic year, provide teachers with direct access to plagiarism detection tools and clear guidelines for responding to violations.
11. Develop and adopt a policy on AI use in studies, including clear rules, risks, and opportunities, and provide training for teachers on responsible integration of AI within the next year.
12. Review and reduce the number of research directions to a manageable set aligned with employers' applied research needs within the two-year period.
13. Ensure that each teaching staff member participates in at least one verifiable scientific or applied research activity (e.g. conference presentation, applied study, research-based supervision) within the two-year period.
14. Identify applied research needs in cooperation with employers and implement at least one joint applied research project in a year addressing clearly defined industry needs, involving teaching staff and, where appropriate, students of the study field.
15. Review and adjust student recruitment and marketing activities to specifically target local applicants, and set measurable annual targets for increasing the share of local students in the study programme.

16. All teaching staff should regularly attend international scientific conferences to be informed about the latest tourism and hospitality trends and get research directions.
17. Evaluate the possibility of introducing the practice of academic staffs' attending each others' classes. Such a practice may positively influence sharing academic ideas and new teaching methods, initiate joint publications and generally improve the quality of a study programme.
18. Organise workshops for teaching staff regarding the academic integrity and publication ethics, as well curricula development.
19. To strengthen international collaboration of the institution, the College should become a part of the international tourism education network (for example TRINET), host webinars with tourism experts, host international summer schools, focus on content marketing on social media etc. Consider joining the UN TedQual network as a global community of educational, training and research institutions in the tourism sector.
20. Within two years, enhance KPI-based monitoring by adding baseline values, measurable targets and defined timelines, enabling more objective assessment of progress and institutional accountability.
21. Over the next year, demonstrate systematic use of student feedback by implementing planned improvements, assessing their impact and communicating the results back to students.
22. Within two years, formalise the complaints-handling procedure by maintaining a comprehensive complaints register, documenting resolutions and ensuring timely feedback to students.
23. Over the next two years, clarify and reinforce programme-level quality assurance responsibilities by ensuring that the Methodological Commission issues documented decisions and carries out regular study programme reviews.
24. Within one year, review and update public information on the College website, especially regarding Erasmus+ mobility opportunities, to ensure accuracy and prevent potentially misleading impressions.
25. Provide basic didactic training for all teaching staff, including visiting lecturers and involve them in institutional activities to enhance teaching quality and engagement.
26. Clearly define and formalize the English language proficiency requirements for teaching staff before the next academic year to ensure adequate teaching and research capacity in English-language study programmes.

Long-term recommendations

1. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of branding and marketing initiatives, ensuring they are supported by strong academic quality and positive student experience.
2. Develop and implement a structured programme of professional development activities for teaching staff, covering applied research methods, ethical publication practices and the use of digital and AI-based research tools.
3. Integrate research results into the study process through the systematic use of innovative, research-based teaching methods.

4. Develop sustained cooperation with academic and industry partners in Lithuania and Estonia through regular joint applied research and related activities integrated into the study field.
5. Strengthen the capacity to attract external project-based funding by actively applying for Erasmus+, Nordplus or similar international education and cooperation projects related to the study field, with the aim of generating supplementary income and reducing exclusive dependence on tuition fees as the sole source of financial sustainability.
6. The institution should strengthen academic staff capacity and motivation to integrate student research activities into the study process by systematically supporting pedagogical development, sharing good practices, and building links between teaching and existing student research initiatives.
7. Fully develop internationalisation strategy also by improvement of mobility (also other than ERASMUS) of academic staff and students and encouraging international cooperation in publications.
8. Include simulation-based learning as an effective teaching method for bridges the gap between theory and practice, help gaining practical skills and making strategic decisions within the industry.
9. Expand the opportunities for joint research between students and academic staff from College and foreign partner institutions.
10. Improve the recognition of the College among employers in the tourism and hospitality industry.
11. Position the College as a desirable host institution for international exchanges of students, academic and administrative staff.
12. Implement a structured and cyclical study programme review system that systematically integrates statistical data, stakeholder feedback and documented improvement actions at study programme level.
13. Expand data-driven decision-making by introducing systematic monitoring of academic progression, completion and graduate outcomes once sufficient data become available.
14. Strengthen stakeholder involvement by systematically collecting, analysing and using employer and graduate feedback following the first internships and graduations.
15. Enhance institutional quality culture by clearly allocating quality assurance responsibilities and providing regular training to ensure consistent understanding and implementation across the College.
16. Diversify the study portfolio and develop stable alternative income streams to reduce reliance on tourism and founder contributions.
17. Modernize and update the library collection so that at least 80% of materials are in Latvian or English to meet international programme standards. Replace also the Russian language materials in course syllabi with Latvian and/or English appropriate resources.
18. Increase the proportion of elected academic staff.

II - "Tourism Service Organisation" ASSESSMENT

II - "Tourism Service Organisation" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The only study programme in the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" at the college is "Tourism Service Organisation". The strategic aim of this study field is to "prepare professional and creative specialists in the tourism and hospitality industry who can operate under changing social, economic, and environmental conditions, skillfully applying digital solutions and sustainable business principles." (SAR p. 12). The study programme goal is "to prepare competent tourism service organizers who are capable of creatively applying digital and sustainable solutions in tourism enterprises, while responding to evolving environmental and market conditions." (SAR, p. 59). The study field's strategic aim and the study programme goal show a strong conceptual alignment, as both seek to prepare graduates who are able to creatively employ digital and sustainable solutions within the tourism sector. Their shared emphasis on adaptability to shifting environmental and market conditions demonstrates consistent strategic direction and harmonisation between field-level vision and programme-level implementation. Thus, it can be concluded that this study programme fully corresponds to the strategic aim of the study field.

2.1.2. The study programme "Tourism Service Organisation" is classified under education code 41812 and is designed as a short-cycle professional higher education study programme leading to the qualification of Tourism Service Organiser. All key parameters — study programme title and code, qualification awarded, volume (120 CP) and duration of studies (2 years full-time or 2 years and 5 months part-time), type and form of studies (full time studies, part time studies, part time extramural studies), admission requirements (secondary education), implementation languages (Latvian and English) and final examination — have remained unchanged since the licensing process. This consistency indicates that the study programme continues to meet legal requirements and maintains structural integrity.

No changes have been made to the design of the study programme, including the names of study courses and their ECTS scope, which ensures compliance with regulatory standards. The implementation languages (English and Latvian) and study options (full time and part time) are clearly defined and appear reasonable for the study programme's objectives. However, there has been no admission to the part-time intramural studies and part-time English studies (whether the candidates from the third countries are not allowed to study in part time), then the College should analyse whether those study modes are necessary at all, because providing six different study modes could potentially fragment still low number of admitted students and force to open small and not profitable groups.

2.1.3. No changes have been made to the study programme's parameters since the licensing procedure. The existing parameters are relevant and appropriate, and the study programme continues to meet the general requirements.

2.1.4. According to the College's justification (SAR, p. 65), the Tourism Service Organisation study programme is positioned as economically significant and aligned with several national strategic documents, including the Latvian National Development Plan 2021–2027 and the Tourism and Events Industry Export Promotion Strategy. Based on the site visit meetings, the College argues that the programme supports national priorities in regional development, sustainable entrepreneurship, and the creation of innovative tourism products. While the experts acknowledge that according to the referred documents the tourism sector has been identified as a priority area, they note that most of the referenced strategies were developed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the

subsequent geopolitical developments, including the war in Ukraine. These events have substantially reshaped the tourism landscape in Latvia, and the market conditions now differ from those envisaged in earlier planning documents. Although the labour market shows signs of recovering demand for qualified specialists, the experts conclude that the programme's relevance and long-term justification would benefit from a more up-to-date and evidence-based analysis reflecting the current dynamics of the sector.

Within the SAR, the document "Statistics on the students of the study programme 'Tourism Service Organisation' for the reporting period" (Annex 3.1.2) was submitted and following the site visit, the experts requested updated student data reflecting the results of the 2025 fall admission, and an updated document (2_3.1.2. Statistics on students for the reporting period) was subsequently provided. A clear inconsistency between the two datasets was identified. In the first table, there were 8 full-time Latvian students (including 5 in the second year), yet the updated table does not account for these students—there are no graduates listed, nor sufficient exmatriculations to explain their absence. Furthermore, the first table showed no students in the English-language study programme, despite the SAR (p. 65) stating that international students were enrolled. In contrast, the updated table suddenly reports 10 students in English study programme and only 4 Latvian students in part-time studies.

Regarding the 2025/2026 data, it is unclear whether these figures include previous admissions, as the table lists 4 students in the second year. If the data were meant to reflect only the 2025 fall intake, second-year students should not appear. Based on the provided information, the experts conclude that the College currently has a total of 25 students (21 in the first year and 4 in the second year), and the fall 2025 admission is included. It is also noteworthy that the SAR (section 3.14, pages 65–66) presents a third version of student numbers, further complicating the picture. Experts are uncertain whether the College has accurate information on the number of its students and their year of study.

Overall, while the total number of students has increased, the dropout rate remains high — 8 students have left during three semesters out of 36 admitted, which is still significant, even with the relatively high drop out rate among international students in Latvia in general.

The College is relatively small, and some student groups are very small (e.g., 4 students). The College acknowledges that this is not financially sustainable but, following the founders' directive, opens every group even if there is only one student. Teaching is conducted according to the study programme and plan, with occasional merging of groups for certain courses, though most groups are taught separately based on study mode. The Head of the Study Field values this flexibility as an opportunity to test and apply new teaching methods.

Since no students have graduated yet, there is no evidence of employment outcomes. However, during site visit meetings, all participating students stated their intention to return to their home countries to establish businesses. No local students were met.

2.1.5. N/A

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The study programme "Tourism Service Organisation" is legally compliant and maintains structural integrity, with all key parameters—title, code, qualification, duration, scope, and admission requirements—unchanged since licensing. The implementation languages (English and Latvian) and study options (full-time and part-time) are clearly defined and reasonable in principle. However, the absence of admissions to certain study modes raises concerns about their necessity, as maintaining six different options for a small student population may fragment resources and reduce efficiency.

The analysis of student statistics reveals significant inconsistencies across different sources, making it difficult to verify enrollment and progression data. While the overall number of students has

increased, the dropout rate remains high, which poses challenges for programme sustainability. The College's practice of opening groups regardless of size demonstrates flexibility but raises concerns about efficiency and resource use.

Strengths:

1) The study programme is clearly aligned with the study field goals.

Weaknesses:

2) Offering six study modes despite very low enrollment in some study programme variants risks inefficient resource use and creates fragmented student groups, which may affect sustainability and quality.

2) Student data provided by the College is inconsistent across different documents and tables, making it unclear how many students are currently enrolled and how admissions and progression are tracked.

3) The dropout rate is high—8 students have left during three semesters out of 36 admitted—indicating challenges in student retention and study programme sustainability.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The aim of the short cycle professional higher education study programme "Tourism Service Organisation" (120 KP/ECTS) is to "prepare competent tourism service organizers who are capable of creatively applying digital and sustainable solutions in tourism enterprises, while responding to evolving environmental and market conditions" (SAR, p. 59). The study programme leads to the 5th European qualification framework level (EQF 5) and corresponds to the 5th level of the Latvian qualifications framework (LQF 5). Full time studies last 4 semesters (2 years), while part-time studies lasts 2.5 years (5 semesters).

General knowledge and skills are supposed to facilitate the career of graduates in the tourism industry. General knowledge courses (30 ECTS) are represented with foreign language courses (Professional English, Professional French, Latvian for foreign students) that strengthen knowledge and skills for students' communication with customers and stakeholders in an international tourism environment (<https://college.lv/en/tourism-programme/>). Other general courses add the economic, legal, communication and research methods competences: Entrepreneurship fundamentals, Human Resource Management, Legal norms and labour rights, Professional communication and ethics. Research method course: Applied research methods and basic statistics is not directly required in the profession standard, although it may be applied. Courses like: Civil defence and environmental protection and Workplace ergonomics and occupational safety are mandatory by the law. Course Study paper and presentation guidelines contribute to students' presentation skills. In general, the study programme content complies with the professional standard.

Among professional study courses (54 ECTS), students learn Introduction to travel and tourism, Reservation systems in travel and tourism, Tourism services sales, Marketing for tourism, Sustainable and responsible tourism, Tourism business environment, Geography of Latvian and world tourism destinations, Tourism product development, International tourism supply chains, Customer experience management in tourism, Project management in tourism, Contemporary tourism types and trends, History of world cultures and heritage, Tourism study project, Digital marketing for tourism, Tourism consumer behaviour (<https://college.lv/en/tourism-programme/>). To some extent, topics in courses like Tourism business environment and Customer experience management in tourism are integrated into more general courses of study. The course Geography of Latvian and world tourism destinations should be split into 2 courses because best practices in compatible study programmes show that it is more systematic to have one course devoted to

worldwide tourism destinations and another devoted to national tourism destinations. Course Contemporary tourism types and trends may get a more accurate name, because term “trends” is more appropriately used as part of conference title, while there should be a wider course to include contemporary tourism types and trends (like, for example, Basics of Tourism).

Generally, the courses’ content cover the main theoretical aspects required for Tourism Service Organisation graduates. Study internship I and Study internship II (24 ECTS) in the frame of 20 weeks are essential for practical skills, but also contribute to learning digital and sustainable solutions in tourism and hospitality companies facing dynamic market conditions. When completing the study programme, students are required to develop, present, and defend a qualification paper (12 ECTS) that contributes to analytical abilities and making appropriate decisions within their competence.

On the other hand, in the site visit meeting with the teaching staff, it was mentioned that the only comparative curricula they used as a model for developing study programme was ones from Turība University in Latvia (with no any international Universities used as benchmark).

During the site visit, representatives of the employers confirmed that such study programmes are attractive and represent the tourism industry and labor market needs. The study courses’ content is partially interconnected, and mainly meets the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends, although some learning outcomes in the course syllabi may be more focused and clear (how well students should meet the goals by the programme in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes after completing courses or the full programme). Non-represented or underrepresented topics in courses’ syllabi include content related to the personalization and shifting consumer preferences in the post-COVID world, consumer behavior in the context of customisation, climate-conscious travel, immersive technologies like VR/AR in tourism, innovation management in the tourism industry.

2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. According to the SAR (pp. 13-14), the study programme is delivered through a combination of lectures and practical tasks, with digital tools integrated into the learning process. During the site visit, staff confirmed that teaching currently relies primarily on lectures and practical classes, which is appropriate for the professional orientation of a short-cycle tourism study programme.

The College has introduced industry-relevant digital tools, notably the Amadeus reservation system, which is used in the computer laboratory to develop sector-specific competencies. The availability of this system is confirmed in SAR Annex 2.5.1 (Agreement with Amadeus Latvia). Staff indicated that the small group size enables interactive sessions, personalised support, and ongoing formative feedback for students.

The Moodle platform is effectively used to provide students with course materials, assignments, assessment criteria, and communication tools, contributing to transparency and supporting student-centred learning. Lecturers reported that they adjust aspects of course delivery based on student feedback gathered from surveys, reflecting an emerging implementation of student-centred principles.

As the study programme is also delivered in English, the expert group paid attention to support mechanisms for students studying in a foreign language. Staff explained that teaching is conducted in English and that the small cohort allows students to receive regular clarification, guidance, and additional feedback when needed.

Overall, the teaching and learning methods currently employed are appropriate for the study programme’s aims and intended learning outcomes. They support the development of both theoretical and practical skills relevant to the tourism industry. However, there are significant issues with the formulation of learning outcomes at the course level:

Some learning outcomes combine multiple verbs instead of focusing on one.

In several cases, verbs are missing entirely (e.g., “Skills to work with practical materials, statistical

information, Internet resources...”).

There are too many learning outcomes for certain courses (e.g., Entrepreneurship Fundamentals, 4 ECTS, lists 12 outcomes).

Only some learning outcomes are linked to the assessment system (e.g., in Entrepreneurship Fundamentals, only 5 of 12 outcomes are assessed).

Learning outcomes are a key tool for expressing student-centred learning and ensuring alignment between teaching, assessment, and intended results. Incorrect or poorly structured learning outcomes complicate student-centred assessment and may hinder the achievement of intended study results.

2.2.4. SAR (pp.70-72) demonstrates that internships are an integral and well-planned component of the study programme. Two internships – Internship I and Internship II – are included in the Study Programme ensuring a gradual development of students’ professional competencies. The College provides internship opportunities by maintaining cooperation agreements with tourism-related enterprises (SAR, Annex 2.5.1. List of cooperation agreements) and by supporting both local and international students in finding suitable internship placements. Students are also allowed to independently select internship providers, provided that the placement meets the defined quality and relevant requirements, which increases flexibility while maintaining academic standards.

The organization of internship work is regulated. Internships are implemented in accordance with the Internship Regulations (SAR, Annex 3.2.6.) approved by the College, which define the purpose, objectives, tasks, supervision, and reporting requirements. The use of the digital internship management platform Edy365.com further strengthens the organization and quality assurance of internships.

According to SAR (pp.70-72) Internship I focuses on familiarizing students with the operational environment of tourism companies, allowing them to observe and participate in basic professional activities, apply legal norms, understand tourism service processes, and develop communication and organizational skills. Internship II builds on this foundation by requiring students to work more independently, apply advanced professional knowledge, engage in tourism product development, marketing analysis, pricing calculations, and real project implementation. These tasks correspond to the competencies required for the qualification of a Tourism Services Organizer and ensure the practical application of theoretical knowledge acquired during studies.

As the study programme has been implemented for only one year and Internship 1 has not yet taken place, these are planned activities whose implementation and evaluation of results have not yet been carried out.

Formal agreements with internship providers and defined supervision procedures ensure that internships meet regulatory and quality standards.

During the experts visit, there was limited evidence available regarding Internship I placements, resulting in uncertainty as to whether all placements are directly aligned with Tourism Service organization. In addition, there was insufficient direct monitoring data to comprehensively assess the quality of Internship I implementation across all internship providers.

For the study programme implemented in a foreign language, the report SAR p. 70 provides a clear assessment of internship provision in English, including for foreign students. The College supports international students in securing appropriate placements. This ensures equal access to internships and effective achievement of learning outcomes for both local and foreign students.

During the experts visit, meeting with employer representatives provided assurance that internship placements are ensured also for foreign students. They confirmed the intention to evaluate the internship in a separate follow-up meeting with employers on what is positively assessed.

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The topics of students' final theses and their relevance to the study field and study programme can't be evaluated as students haven't reached the final thesis writing stage.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Generally, the study programme is attractive and corresponds to the trends in the tourism industry and labor market needs. The courses' content cover the main theoretical aspects required for Tourism Service Organisation graduates. The study courses' content is partially interconnected.

Internships are planned as an integral part of the study programme, ensuring students' professional competencies through two internship stages. The organization, regulation and quality assurance of internships are supported by Internship Regulations and formal cooperation agreements with potential employers. Planned internship tasks are partially aligned with the intended learning outcomes and qualification requirements of a Tourism Services Organizer.

Teaching and learning methods combine lectures with practical tasks and include digital tools, and overall are considered appropriate for the study programme's aims and intended learning outcomes. The study programme uses the Amadeus reservation system and Moodle for course materials, assignments, assessment criteria and communication, and small group size supports interaction and additional feedback for students studying in English. However, student-centred alignment is weakened by course-level learning outcomes that are often poorly formulated, overly numerous and inconsistently linked to assessment.

Strengths:

- 1) Equal access to internship opportunities for local and foreign students, including support for students in finding placements, with confirmed availability of English-language internships and employer engagement.
- 2) Representatives of the employers confirmed that the study programme represents the tourism industry and labor market needs.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Insufficient evidence was available during the site visit regarding Internship I placements, creating uncertainty about whether all placements are directly related to Tourism Service organization.
- 2) Limited direct monitoring data at the time of evaluation on the actual implementation quality of Internship I across all internship providers.
- 3) Courses syllabi may need improvement related to scientific/applied research "hot topics" (for example, post- COVID tourism, consumer behavior in the context of personalisation and customisation in tourism, climate-conscious travel, regenerative tourism tools, use of immersive technologies like VR/AR in tourism, smart tourism tools etc.)
- 4) Learning outcomes are poorly formulated, overly numerous, and inconsistently linked to assessment, which undermines student-centred learning and achievement of intended results.

Assessment of the requirement [5] (applicable only to master's or doctoral study programmes)

- 1 R5 - The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings of the respective field of science or field of artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. According to SAR (pp. 28-30) the College has developed a financial framework that directly supports the delivery of the Study Programme and the attainment of its learning outcomes. Funding for the Study Programme is calculated based on the approved number of student places and a defined per-student base cost, covering salaries for academic staff, social insurance contributions, infrastructure upkeep, technical resources, study programme development, and operational expenses. The primary sources of funding include tuition fees, income from other activities and contributions from the founder, all regulated through an approved price list with flexible payment options.

A structured system is in place to support scientific and research activities. Students may receive up to €100 per year, and academic staff up to €350 per year, to participate in conferences and publish research. Additionally, a dedicated funding scheme for student research includes a regulated scientific paper competition with monetary prizes for winners. These initiatives provide direct incentives and financial support for research engagement, reinforcing the research-oriented approach of the study process and supporting the development of analytical and research skills.

The College's material and technical infrastructure is suitable and sufficient for delivering the Study Programme. Students and staff have access to modern, well-maintained classrooms and computer labs, including a specialized lab equipped with the Amadeus reservation system, which is highly relevant to tourism studies and aligned with industry standards.

A functional Moodle e-learning platform provides structured access to course descriptions, teaching materials and learning resources. The existing infrastructure adequately supports the current study process.

Through a cooperation agreement with the Baltic International Academy, the College ensures comprehensive access to informational and methodological resources. Students and staff can use a well-equipped library with reading rooms, computers, printing facilities and extended opening hours. The library collections, both physical and electronic, include literature relevant to the study field and related disciplines and access to major international scientific databases (e.g., EBSCO, SCOPUS, ScienceDirect), as well as national and open-access resources show that the available resources are sufficient to run this study programme.

Methodological resources are regularly updated through a structured annual planning and acquisition process coordinated with the partner library and additional collaboration with the University of Latvia Library and the National Library of Latvia what further expands access to scientific literature.

Overall, the College's study, research, informational, technical, and financial resources are aligned with the requirements and conditions of the Study Programme. They provide sufficient and appropriate foundations for achieving the intended learning outcomes.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. According to SAR (pp. 29-30 and 73-74) the Study Programme is implemented within a clearly defined financial governance framework. Strategic, financial, and operational decisions are taken by the College Board while the Director is responsible for day-to-day management and for submitting the annual budget for Board approval. The approved budget forms the financial basis for the implementation of the study and research processes.

Funding for the Study Field and the Study Programme is calculated as base funding, determined according to the specific Study Programme and the number of enrolled students. Base funding covers all key expenditure categories required for full implementation of the study process, including academic staff salaries, employer's mandatory social insurance contributions, services and infrastructure costs, material and technical resources necessary for study programme delivery, and

programme development and improvement activities.

The funding sources for the Study Programme are diversified and consist of tuition fees, income from the College's economic activities and funds provided by the founder to a large extent. Tuition fees are regulated through an approved price list and implemented via study agreements, including structured payment plans and individually tailored payment schedules or tuition fee discounts approved by the Director and the Board. This funding model theoretically ensures predictable income while maintaining flexibility to support student retention and study programme continuity.

The minimum number of students required to ensure the financial viability of the Study Programme is clearly defined for each implementation option: full-time on-site studies: minimum 14 students, part-time on-site (intramural) studies: minimum 12 students, part-time extramural studies: minimum 11 students.

Detailed cost calculations per study place demonstrate that the financial structure of the study programme is stable and consistent across all study modes. The total annual cost per study place amounts to €1,683.83 for full-time on-site studies, €1,685.79 for part-time intramural studies, and €1,657.16 for part-time extramural studies. In all modes, the largest share of costs is allocated to academic staff salaries (approximately 68%) and mandatory social insurance contributions (approximately 16%), ensuring the availability of qualified teaching staff and continuity of the study process. The remaining funds are planned to allocate to infrastructure, technical resources and Study Programme development, directly supporting the quality and sustainability of the Study Programme.

Although the current number of students in the Study Programme is below the defined minimum thresholds, the College has implemented concrete and documented measures to ensure the full implementation of the study process and the financial sustainability of the Study Programme through the founder's contribution serving as a risk-mitigation mechanism and demonstrating the founder's strategic commitment to the Study Programme's continuity and development. At the same time, providing six study modes despite very low enrolment in several study programme variants risks inefficient use of resources and results in fragmented student cohorts, potentially affecting both sustainability and quality.

While the College operates a transparent and effective financial structure that supports study programme delivery and research, and currently sustains the study programme through accumulated profits and founder contributions, experts note that strong dependence on founder funding represents a strategic risk. Failure to achieve self-financing in the near future may threaten the long-term sustainability of the Study Field and Programme.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The College has established a coherent and transparent system of financial, material, scientific, and informational provision that ensures the full implementation of the Study Programme and supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The available funding mechanisms, research support instruments, and material-technical infrastructure provide stable prerequisites for a study process aligned with the specific characteristics of the Study Programme. While the current provision system is functional, further strategic development of resources and increased institutional autonomy would strengthen long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

Strengths:

- 1) A structured system for supporting scientific and research activities, including dedicated funding for students and academic staff and incentives through scientific competitions, enhances research engagement and the academic quality of the Study Programme.
- 2) Comprehensive material, technical, and informational resources, including industry-relevant software (Amadeus), a functional Moodle platform and access to extensive international scientific

databases through institutional partnerships, effectively support teaching and learning.

Weaknesses:

1) Funding is largely based on the founder's contribution, which does not ensure financial stability and the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the Study Programme, and institutional autonomy.

Assessment of the requirement [6]

- 1 R6 - Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The College has developed a framework for financial, material, scientific, and informational resources, ensuring the delivery of the Study Programme and facilitating the attainment of its intended learning outcomes. Existing funding options, research support tools, and material-technical infrastructure create a foundation for a study process tailored to the specific requirements of the Study Programme. Although the current resource system allows the study programme to function and manage its financial situation, long-term sustainability and competitiveness are not fully ensured. Limited strategic resource development and restricted institutional autonomy may affect the programme's ability to adapt and remain competitive in the future.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. Teaching staff in this study programme consists of ones with academic and vocational background and have basic qualifications in accordance with requirements of the regulatory acts. In this study programme, there are 5 elected personnel: 4 lecturers and 1 assistant professor (docent), while there are 3 visiting senior lecturers (docents) and 6 visiting lecturers (Annex 2.3.1.). Basic information about the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study field). The unavailability of international visiting lecturers coming for teaching mobility should be addressed in order to keep the teaching process on an international level. Lecturers participate in conferences and some applied research (SAR Annex, Academic staff CV, pp. 46-48), although tourism related conferences and projects are underrepresented. As given in SWOT analysis of Riga Management College Development Strategy 2023-2028, academic staff is skilled in IT, databases, and innovative methods usage.

Existing funding and incentives for academic staff to support participation in conferences and further research contribute to the research based learning and achievement of learning outcomes of this study programme. But, it is indicative that the most numerous and the most relevant publications in tourism marketing, smart tourism and sustainable tourism, as well tourism and hospitality related projects come from academic staff fully employed at the City University College Nikosia.

2.4.2. The structure of the academic staff engaged in the study programme is relatively stable. Despite the high number of guest lecturers compared to elected lecturers at the College, all subjects of the study programme are covered. As given in SAR (p. 76), the implementation of the study programme involves 14 academic staff members, 3 of whom hold a doctoral degree. There is 1 elected senior lecturer (docent) with doctoral degree, while 2 visiting lecturers with doctoral degree. In order to provide the practical components of the study programme and competitiveness on the

labour market, some teaching staff have experience as industry professionals, although very few in this study programme (for example: experienced tourist guide, hotel animation leader, engaged expert in categorisation of hotels).

Further opportunities are indicated in Riga Management College Development Strategy 2023/2028 which indicates that “the College plans to recruit academic staff with substantial research experience and develop existing staff’s research skills, encouraging them to engage in research and providing financial support in line with the College’s scientific research regulations.”

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. As given in SAR Annex 2.4.1. (Compilation of Quantitative Data on Scientific and Applied Research Activities During the period 2020-25), academic staff of the College published 73 publications, participated in 22 conferences and had 31 project participation. In the site visit meeting with teaching staff, it was confirmed that the College provides funding for participation in conferences.

Topics covered in the academic staff research correspond to supported research areas given in Riga Management College Development Plan 2023-2028: Sustainable tourism development, Tourism marketing and consumer behavior, Quality management in tourism, Professional development and workforce advancement in tourism etc. Still, a professional study programme profile requires applied research which is under represented. Several publications are in Latvian which limits their international use.

Each member of the academic staff has published peer-reviewed, including international editions in the last six years. Few teaching staff have at least 5 years of practical experience within the tourism and hospitality industry.

Regarding the practical experience, several lecturers have years long experience in the tourism and hospitality industry (hotel animation project leader, tourist guide, expert for evaluation/categorisation of hotels) which contribute to learning outcomes and bridging the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge of the students.

Based on the site visit meeting with the College staff, the tourism study programme represents the main focus of the institution. Accordingly, one of the main goals indicated in Riga Management College Development Strategy 2023/2028 is to “conduct applied and market-oriented research in tourism.” Although the “Tourism Service Organisation” is a professional study programme and publications’ requirements of academic staff are different then for academic study programmes, it should be said that some of the teaching staff have key publications in journal frequently considered as borderline predatory journals (for example "Sustainability" etc. that has high article processing charges, very fast peer review, overuse of special issues, aggressive journal promotion etc.).

The research directions are given in the College Scientific Research Development Strategy for 2023–2028. But, scientific publications include few articles, and mainly conference papers. The College provides incentives for academic staff with up to €350 per year for conference attending and publication. However, applied research, especially with the tourism industry partners, is underrepresented, particularly related to contemporary topics like tourism and neuroscience, digital transformation in the post-COVID tourism, safety and security in tourism, smart and “bleisure” travel, climate resilience and deseasonalisation strategies, lesser-known destinations’s management etc.

It should be mentioned that some of the tasks of the Methodological Commission (SAR, p. 19) relates to analysing of the work of academic staff related to the implementation of course and recommendations for improvement; evaluation and approving course content, evaluation and approving methodological materials for study; evaluation of the open lecture of the applicants for academic staff positions. However, the effectiveness of the Methodological Commission work remained unclear during the site visit meeting.

2.4.5. Mechanisms for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff are departmental meetings. Academic staff attend some organised professional development seminars, although very few of them. As given in SAR Annex Analysis of Students Survey results (2025), there is a plan for organising “internal seminar for lecturers on pedagogical communication to reduce language barrier and promote student engagement and satisfaction”.

According to SAR (p. 7), the Methodological Commission monitors the content implementation and the study outcomes' achievement. Also, the Methodological Committee evaluates the interconnection of study courses and approves course content, so that topics do not overlap. But, in the site visit meeting, there was no insight that teachers consult with each other to avoid overlapping the curricula content in the study programme. Anyhow, joint publications represent interconnection of study courses and cooperation between the Colleges' academic staff.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by indicating strengths and weaknesses

Teaching staff have qualifications according to the requirements and regulatory acts. The composition of the teaching staff engaged in the study programme implementation is relatively stable. Few teachers with practical experience within the industry are present to provide a hands-on component to learning and improve students' competitiveness in the labor market. Small number of academic staffs' peer-reviewed editions.

Strengths:

- 1) Academic staff is skilled in IT, databases and innovative methods usage.
- 2) The College gives financial incentive for academic staffs' participation in conferences etc.
- 3) Cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme has been established through some joint publications.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Only a few teaching staff in the study programme have relevant industry experience, limiting the practical orientation and labour-market competitiveness of the study programme.
- 2) Underrepresented international partnerships.
- 3) Some academic staff publications are given in borderline predatory journals.
- 4) Publications in Latvian limit international use.
- 5) Teachers do not systematically consult with each other to prevent overlap in curriculum content.

Assessment of the requirement [7]

- 1 R7 - Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme is predominantly in compliance with the qualification of the academic staff and visiting lecturers related to the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments. More focus should be given to increase the number of academic staff with the experience in the tourism sector and in applied research projects as well.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

- 1 1 - The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme fully complies with the Professional Higher Education Standard (Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305 of 13 June 2023). The requirements set out in Paragraphs 9, 10 and 12 of the Regulation regarding the content of short-cycle professional higher education study programmes are complied with.

The study programme includes study courses aimed at developing professional entrepreneurship competences in a volume of at least 9 ECTS, in accordance with the requirement set out in Paragraph 11.

The study programme also complies with the requirements set out in Paragraph 13 of the Regulation, and its content takes into account the content and volume requirements defined in the Environmental Protection Law, the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law, and the related Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Minimum requirements for the content of the mandatory civil protection course and the content of civil protection training for employees" (see SAR Annex 3.2.4.).

- 2 2 - The study programme complies with a valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification (if there is no professional standard required for the relevant occupation) provided if the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the requirements of the professional standard "Tourism Services Organiser". As reflected in SAR Annex 3.2.2, the study courses included in the study programme ensure the acquisition of the skills, attitudes, professional knowledge and competences specified in the professional standard.

- 3 3 - The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The course descriptions (SAR Annex 3.2.5) have been fully prepared in accordance with the requirements set out in Section 56.1, Paragraph Two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The requirements specified in Section 56.2, Paragraph Two of the Law are not applicable, as the study programme does not include study modules.

Based on the information obtained during the site visit meetings, it can be concluded that the study materials have been developed in line with the progress of the implementation of the study programme.

- 4 4 - The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The diploma template (SAR Annex 3.1.1) complies with the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Procedure for the Issuance of State-Recognised Documents Certifying Higher Education" (No. 202 of 16 April 2013).

- 5 5 - The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 6 6 - Academic study programmes provided for less than 250 full-time students may be implemented and less than five professors and associated professors of the higher education institution may be involved in the implementation of the mandatory and limited elective part of these study programmes provided that the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 7 7 - At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 8 8 - The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex 2.3.3 of the SAR confirms that the state language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 157 of 8 March 2022, "Regulations on the Scope of State Language Proficiency, the Procedure for State Language Proficiency Examination, and the State Fee for the Proficiency Examination".

- 9 9 - The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex 2.3.3 of the SAR contains a certification by the Acting Director of the College regarding the foreign language proficiency level of all teaching staff. It follows that the English language proficiency of all teaching staff involved in the delivery of the study programme in a foreign language corresponds to at least level B2.

- 10 10 - The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study agreement template (Annex 3.1.1 of SAR) includes all mandatory provisions specified in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Mandatory Provisions to Be Included in a Study Agreement" (No. 70 of 23 January 2007).

- 11 11 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex 2.1.3 of the SAR confirms that agreement has been concluded with Riga Nordic University (study programme “Tourism Service Organisation (41812)”) ensuring that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or at another accredited higher education institution or college in the event that the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

The College has an agreement with the “HOTEL SCHOOL” Hotel Management College (for study programme “Hospitality Service Organisation”) but according to database of AIKA “HOTEL SCHOOL” Hotel Management College implements only study programme “Hotel Operations Management” (41811).

- 12 12 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme’s license is revoked due to the actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex 2.1.4 of the SAR confirms that, in accordance with Section 55(8) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Paragraph 13.4 of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations “Regulations on the Licensing of Study Programmes” (11 December 2018), the higher education institution guarantees compensation for losses to students if the study programme is not accredited or its licence is revoked due to the actions or omissions of the institution and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 13 13 - The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 55.(1), Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 14 14 - Compliance with the requirements specified in other regulatory enactments that apply to the study programme being assessed (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

- 1 R8 - Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other applicable regulatory enactments is confirmed based on the analysis of the self-assessment report and its annexes, as well as the information obtained during the site visit meetings.

General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths and weaknesses of the study programme

The study programme “Tourism Service Organisation” demonstrates relevance to labour market needs, supported by employer feedback confirming demand for graduates in the growing Latvian tourism industry. The study programme benefits from several notable strengths: a stable structure of academic staff ensuring coverage of all subjects, structured support for research activities through dedicated funding and incentives, and adequate teaching and learning resources, including industry-relevant software (Amadeus), a functional Moodle platform, and access to international

scientific databases. Equal access to internships for both local and international students further enhances the programme's practical orientation. These elements collectively contribute to achieving the study programme's aims and intended learning outcomes.

Despite these strengths, the evaluation identified significant weaknesses that require attention. The offering of six study modes, despite very low enrolment in some, risks inefficient resource allocation and fragmented student groups, which may negatively impact sustainability and quality. Student data inconsistencies across documents create uncertainty regarding enrolment, progression, and retention, while the dropout rate (8 students out of 36 admitted within three semesters) signals challenges in student engagement and study programme viability. The academic staff structure, with numerous non-elected lecturers and a small number of PhD-qualified staff, may limit the study programme's capacity to achieve its academic and research goals. Financial sustainability is a critical concern, as funding relies heavily on the founder's contribution, which does not guarantee long-term stability. Furthermore, insufficient international partnerships and the publications in Latvian restrict global visibility and collaboration. Methodological issues persist, including several poorly formulated learning outcomes that are overly numerous and inconsistently linked to assessment, undermining student-centred learning. Course syllabi also require updates to incorporate contemporary tourism topics such as post-COVID trends, climate-conscious travel, and smart tourism technologies. Limited evidence regarding Internship I placements and monitoring raises concerns about the consistency and relevance of practical training.

Overall, while these weaknesses are significant, none appear insurmountable within a two-year period if targeted improvements are implemented. The study programme can be delivered in all declared implementation options and languages; however, the College should critically assess the feasibility of maintaining multiple study modes with low enrolment to ensure resource efficiency and quality. Strategic actions are needed to strengthen financial sustainability, improve internationalisation, revise learning outcomes and assessment alignment, and modernise course content. The study programme is implementable in its current form, but its long-term success depends on addressing structural, financial, and methodological challenges through focused development measures.

Evaluation of the study programme "Tourism Service Organisation"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Tourism Service Organisation"

Short-term recommendations

1. Before the next admission period, analyze the relevance and demand for all study modes, and consider reducing or consolidating options with consistently low or no admissions to ensure efficient resource allocation and maintain study programme quality and College's reputation.
2. Before the next academic year, establish a unified and transparent system for recording and reporting student data, ensuring consistency across all official documents and timely updates after each admission cycle and student exmatriculation or progress to the next year.
3. At least once per year analyze the reasons for the high dropout rate and implement targeted measures to improve student retention, such as enhanced academic support, better integration of international students, and monitoring of student engagement.

4. Put more effort on promotion of the study programme to increase the enrollment of the students in the study programme.
5. Collect and document detailed information on all Internship placements to ensure they are directly related to Tourism Service organization.
6. Implement a standardized monitoring system for Internship including regular feedback from students and internship providers, to assess implementation quality.
7. Review and revise all course-level learning outcomes to ensure they are clear, measurable, limited in number.
8. Actively expand international partnerships to enhance study programme development and encourage publishing in widely accessible languages (e.g., English) to improve international visibility, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.
9. Encourage regular meetings among teaching staff from different subjects to coordinate curriculum content, identify overlaps and gaps, and discuss student progress. This will help ensure coherent study programme delivery and prevent unnecessary repetition of introductory material, allowing more time for advanced content. Involve also visiting lecturers to the methodological activities and processes if possible.
10. Update course syllabi within the next one to two years to incorporate current scientific and applied research topics, including post-COVID tourism trends, personalised consumer behavior, climate-conscious and regenerative tourism, and emerging technologies such as VR/AR and smart tourism tools.
11. Update the course literature within the next one to two years to ensure that required literature and learning materials reflect recent developments in the tourism sector, including post-pandemic changes and other current industry trends. This will help ensure that the course content remains relevant, contemporary, and aligned with ongoing sectoral developments.
12. Within the next year, enhance research quality assurance by establishing clear guidance on reputable publication channels, raising staff awareness of predatory journals, and promoting publication in recognised, peer-reviewed academic outlets.
13. Establish a structured resource planning and procurement cycle for study programmes (clear responsibilities, prioritisation criteria, budgeting links, documented decisions and follow-up) and gradually introduce tourism-specific digital tools/software to strengthen practical training and alignment with current industry practice.

Long-term recommendations

1. The College should increase the proportion of teaching staff with relevant industry experience to strengthen the practical components of the study programme and enhance graduates' competitiveness in the labour market.
2. Develop a structured internship quality assurance framework to track, evaluate, and continuously improve all Tourism Service placements.
3. Strengthen partnerships with internship providers to ensure alignment with learning outcomes and provide consistent mentoring and supervision for students.

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Partially compliant	The College has developed a formal quality assurance framework and procedures; however, several key QA mechanisms described in the SAR could not be demonstrated in practice, including programme-level review, KPI monitoring, methodological commission activity, and systematic data analysis. Therefore, the requirement is only partially fulfilled.
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Partially compliant	The study field has established a formal framework for scientific and applied research, including defined research directions, support mechanisms and student involvement opportunities. However, applied research—particularly in cooperation with industry—is still at an early and fragmented stage, and research practices are unevenly implemented across the study field. Therefore, the current level of development partially corresponds to the expected level for scientific and applied research in a professionally oriented study field.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Partially compliant	The College cooperates with different institutions from Latvia and has established a formal framework for internationalisation - Internationalization strategy 2023-2028. However, lack of students' and staff mobility influences that current status partially corresponds to the expected level of internationalisation.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.		Partially compliant	Several recommendations from the previous assessment procedures have been implemented, while others remain only partially implemented or are still in progress. In particular, the planned proportion of local and international students has not been achieved, and cooperation with industry and Baltic partners is still developing, whereas some recommendations are constrained by objective regulatory conditions.

Assessment of the Requirements for the Relevant Study Programmes of the Study Field

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Tourism Service Organisation (41812)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Average

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

There were no dissenting opinions between the experts.